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HUSBANDS AND HOMES.

BY

MARION HARLAND,

AUTHOR OF "ALONE," "HIDDEN PATH," "NEMESIS," "MARIAM," ETC



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TO

LOUIS A. GODEY, ESQ.,

THE EARLY AND CONSTANT FRIEND OF MY AUTHOR-LIFE,

This Volume

IS CORDIALLY DEDICATED,

MARION HARLAND.

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NOBODY TO BLAME.

CHAPTER I.

MRS. BOYLAN was an amiable woman. Amiability had been her forte through life. By it she had won the largest piece of pie, the slice of cake which contained most plums, the warm corner by the fire, and a Benjamin's share of caresses and praises, whenever a parental review was held of the juvenile corps of which she was a member. It was impossible to quarrel with her. To the occasional rudeness of a brother or the taunt of a sister, her only reply was a grieved look and a flow of silent tears, whose soft eloquence convicted the assailant in the eyes of lookers-on, if not in his own, as a barbarian of an aggravated type of inhumanity.

When grown into a comely maiden, this absolute want of spirit was still the fair Eliza's prime recommendation in the eyes of Rufus Boylan, an enterprising young merchant, who was conscious of having temper enough to stock the establishment he proposed to himself to found very shortly after his introduction to this paragon of femininity. "Milk and mildness," says a distinguished writer, "are not the best things for keeping, and when they turn only a little sour, they may disagree seriously with young stomachs." How many times, during each day, the undeveloped features of the Boylan babies were literally bathed with the maternal tears, how soon their ears became familiarized with the plaintive whine, the sobbing moan,

the long-drawn sigh of their ever-suffering, yet always amiable mother, it would require a "patent reckoner" to compute.

"What ails your mother?" once whispered a sympathizing little visitor to Tiny, the eldest daughter, then about seven years of age.

Mrs. Boylan was rocking in her large, cushioned chair, having just deposited the sleeping form of her youngest hope — or sorrow — in the cradle. Her face was buried in her handkerchief, and from its depths there issued at regular intervals a heart-breaking sob.

"Oh! she is only having a good cry!" said Tiny, carelessly. "She takes them any time. Just see my Dolly's new shoes!"

Not that the lachrymose appeared to the world at large to be Mrs. Boylan's normal state. She was plump and rosy, even when a matron of fifty. Her tears were of that harmless and abundant kind that leaves no furrow upon the skin, no smarting of the eyes or redness of the nose. On the contrary, her complexion seemed to derive benefit, to be freshened and enriched by this liberal irrigation. If a child fell down stairs and fractured an arm; if a servant broke a valuable dish, or her husband inveighed with uncommon bitterness against her "slipshod ways," the obedient brine streamed forth to bemoan, to rebuke, to deprecate — above all, to relieve her own oppressed bosom, and in five minutes afterwards no trace of the storm was perceptible. Her face had resumed the "sweet expression" so often admired when she was the subject of remark amongst her friends, and her voice its delicious drawl.

Mr. Boylan was a shrewd business man, and he was not slow to make the discovery that his speculation in amiability was an unlucky investment. As we have hinted, his disposition was the reverse of lamb-like. He was quick, passionate, and uncharitable in judgment, one who needed most delicate and judicious management to render him a desirable companion

for life. He tried, at the outset of the pilgrimage matrimonial, to be very patient and forbearing, very tender and considerate with his young and sensitive wife — self-control and thoughtfulness which she never appreciated, or indeed suspected. Next, he essayed argument. She opened her eyes in perplexity, and as the dim consciousness that he was finding fault with her dawned upon her misty soul, the fogs dissolved in a flood of tears, and the conscience-smitten bridegroom kissed her and begged pardon.

“But he has gotten bravely over that sort of thing!” Mrs. Boylan would say to her third daughter; the others never troubled themselves to hearken to “Ma’s everlasting grievances.” “It is thirty-one years, next month, since we had our first quarrel, since he first got angry with me, I mean; for if I *do* say it that shouldn’t say it, I never had so much as a dispute with any one in my life. Since that miserable morning — hardly two months after our wedding-day! no one knows what I have been through. Ah! girls little know what they are doing when they marry — poor, blind, silly creatures!”

“Why, Ma, there are some happy marriages, I am sure,” rejoined the girl cheerily. “Marian and Will are very contented together.”

“Ah! your sister Marian is a wife of my training. She understands that submission is a woman’s lot. That is a sad lesson that you will have to learn, Maggie, if you don’t want to be miserable.”

“I do not covet misery! that is certain!” and Maggie gave an amused laugh, in which there was a slight tone of embarrassment. “But all men are not tyrants. Will is very indulgent. Between ourselves, I fancy that Marian has her way quite as often as he does, perhaps oftener. He thinks her a pattern of perfection.”

“That may be so. It is very likely that she does rule him.

Tiny and Marion both take after your father. You are the only child I have that looks a bit like me, or resembles me in disposition. Your sister Lizzie was my image, everybody said. Dear little thing! she was taken from the evil to come. I only hope you will have an easier time in this world than your mother has had!"

The convenient handkerchief had wiped away the large drops that foretold a threatening shower, when the door flew open, and a young lady (we call her so, *par complaisance*) bounced in. No other word could so aptly describe her style of entrance.

"Just as I expected! Just *exactly* what I said."

"What is the matter, Tiny?" inquired her sister.

"What is the matter?' That is a good one!" Miss Boylan laughed scornfully. "Oh! it is nothing to you! I don't doubt that! Here I am slaving myself to death, preparing for your company, while you are sitting up here, fine lady-like, gossiping with Ma! It is just like you! Precisely like you!"

"I am very sorry, my dear, that your sister did not know—" Mrs. Boylan said, tremulously.

"Did not know? Nobody knows why the house is turned upside down and inside out, if she does not! For whom is all this fuss made, I should like to inquire? It is not *my* coming-out party. I am an ignoramus; but that is one thing I do profess to know perfectly well!"

"I ask your pardon, Tiny," said Maggie, rising and putting aside her work — a cap she was altering for her mother. "I understood you to say, this morning, that you would not need me until to-morrow. I will do whatever I can to help you. What shall I set about first?"

"It is probable that I have time to show you your work as well as to attend to mine — highly probable!" returned Tiny, sourly ironical. "A child can see that there is everything to

be done, and nobody but me to lay hand to an individual thing. And I don't suppose that you are to be trusted to undertake the simplest job, unless I am by to overlook you. You bread-and-butter schoolgirls are the most useless beings in creation ! The most utterly useless !”

Mrs. Boylan had retired hopelessly into the depths of her cambrie before this philippic was half through. Maggie could not count upon her championship. If there was any one living whom the mother feared as much, if not more than she did her liege lord, it was this daughter. Fancy a keen, spiteful darn-ing-needle inspired with a spirit of active hostility against an eider-down cushion, and you have a lively image of the combats that were hourly occurring between these two. If the pillow were a sentient object, it would doubtless object to the thrusts and pricks and pokes of its opponent, yet the yielding substance closes up the wound the instant the point is withdrawn, and the luxurious mass is whole and comfortable as before. It would have been singular had the children of such a woman respected her, but the contemptuous impatience that characterized Tiny's deportment towards her was indicative no less of a want of heart than ill-breeding.

Maggie flushed up at her sister's offensive observations, but her voice only betokened wounded feeling as she replied, “I don't see why you should say that, Tiny. You have not tried me yet to see whether I am competent or not. I may not be so useless as you suppose.”

“Oh ! you are conceited enough — Goodness knows ! You always had a sufficient quantity of vanity. A plentiful supply !”

“What are you hectoring the child about now, Tiny ?” asked a voice behind the shrew. “Has she been interfering with your monopoly of vanity ?” Tiny wheeled about like a tee-Tiny wheeled about like a teetotum.

"I am 'hectoring' her, as you call it, Mrs. Ainslie, for what you are constantly upholding and encouraging her in — her incorrigible and selfish laziness! Pa may well say that but for me the house would go to wreck and ruin. When I recollect the condition of affairs when I first took the reins into my hands —"

"Fifteen years ago — wasn't it?" interrupted the married sister, maliciously.

"When I was the merest child," pursued Tiny, pretending not to hear the saucy query, "I wonder that I have succeeded in bringing anything like order out of the confusion. No one ever had more unpromising subjects to work upon. Here's Ma, who never does anything but fret and hinder me —"

A piteous moan from behind the handkerchief, and an imploring "O, Tiny!" from Maggie.

"And Maggie, who is enough to wear one's patience out — a yea-nay red and white doll, with no more character than there is in a stick of barley-sugar."

"Barley-sugar is a very popular article of confectionery," commented Mrs. Ainslie.

"And last and most provoking — my Lady Marian, who, not satisfied with hen-pecking her unfortunate husband, must be meddling continually with other people's family concerns. Pa is the only reasonable creature in the whole party."

"Because he does not happen to be present?" said Marian, interrogatively. "He has one comfort amidst all his afflictions, there is little danger that his model housekeeper — the one grain of salt that preserves the rest of us from spoiling outright — will ever be separated from him, except by the grim enemy of all man and womankind."

"Miss Tiny, a man from the confectioner's wants to see you," said a servant, and Tiny bounced out, as she had entered, drawing to the door with a concussion that shook the house.

Mrs. Ainslie laughed ; her mother sobbed ; Maggie sighed.

"Oh dear ! I wish Tiny would not have these spells !"

"Spells ! do you call them, my dear ? I think it is a chronic and incurable malady. What set her at you ? As Will says — 'What got her back up ?' He insists upon it, that she was a cat in a former state of existence."

"I was in fault, I suppose," said Maggie, contritely. "It was thoughtless in me to settle myself for a quiet chat with Ma when there was so much to be done in the way of preparation for to-morrow night. I have been away from home so long that I am apt to forget household duties. Yet I thought that Tiny said she did not need my services."

"That is one of the few true things that have passed her lips to-day. One would suppose, to hear her talk, that she had some call to be busy, whereas, if your party were to-night instead of to-morrow, there would be nothing for even such a fussy manager as she is, to do, but to arrange the flowers in the parlors and dress herself. The hired waiters will attend to everything else that remains unfinished."

"Maggie, my dear !" said Mrs. Boylan, languidly, "I think I will lie down for awhile. You can take the cap down stairs, or into your chamber. And Marian is here to keep you company, so you will not miss me."

"Yes, ma'am — but I shall want you to try this on pretty soon now. I cannot finish it very well until you do."

"I am sorry my love — but you must wait until I get up. I am really quite worn out, in nerves and strength, by all that I have borne from you children to-day."

"Now, Ma ! will you never be just to Maggie and myself ?" said Marian, impatiently. "Why class us with Tiny, when we are innocent of any offence against you, or her either, for that matter. It was not our fault that she preceded us into the world, and that we are blessed with better tempers than that

which has fallen to her lot. Are you afraid that we will turn tell-tales, if you dare to say once that she has done wrong?"

"If you have any regard for my feelings, Marian, you will say no more of this unhappy altercation," said Mrs. Boylan, on the verge of another lachrymal overflow. "These misunderstandings between you girls have been the cause of the deepest grief to me from the time you were born. I often wonder if other people's children quarrel as mine do. You commenced it by the time you could talk. It was twenty-five years ago, last Thursday, that Tiny flew into a passion with poor, dear little Rufus, and pushed him over into the fire. The scar was on his chin when he died, two years and four months afterwards."

"Tiny alone was to blame in that fray, I suppose — was she not?" asked Marian. Your skirts and mine are clear at any rate, Maggie. It would not be safe to repeat that story in her presence. Twenty-five years ago! Think what a fury she would be in at the inference that she was old enough then to attempt and nearly succeed in the murder of a younger brother! When she would have the public believe that she is the junior of your humble servant, who is not afraid to own to her twenty-two years!"

"I don't see why you should be!" said Mrs. Boylan, sleepily. "A married woman need never be ashamed to tell her age. Maggie, child, close the blinds, and get the Affghan out of the closet there to throw over me — will you? My head aches. These pillows are getting hard! They ought to be re-stuffed. Shut the door after you, and don't — let — Tiny — come — up — while — I — am — asleep!"

CHAPTER II.

MAGGIE BOYLAN beheld a pleasing picture in the drawing-room mirror, as she stood before it upon the evening that was to introduce her to the gay world. True, her features were not, in all respects, so regular as Marian's, nor her waist, hands, and feet so diminutive as Tiny's, but she had a clear skin, rosy cheeks, large brown eyes with a loving look in their depths, red lips, abundant and lustrous hair, and she was just nineteen years old. She looked like what she was — a happy, simple-hearted, affectionate girl; such a woman as one always pictures to himself as ripening with time into the fond and faithful wife, the devoted mother, the patient, skilful nurse, a joy in prosperity — a very sun of comfort in sorrow.

Mrs. Ainslie was the most intellectual and the most queenly in stature and bearing, of the sisters. She was dark-haired and a brunette, animated in manner, and more quick than merciful in *repartee*. Still, except in retorting upon Tiny's speeches, there was seldom any venom in her raillery, and Will Ainslie, the good-natured and good-looking gentleman who was chatting with his father-in-law and attentively inspecting the trio of full-dressed belles, thought again within himself, as he had done scores of times before, that he had culled the flower of the flock.

Poor Tiny! no one awarded to her this distinction except her own self-conceit. She was short and slight — *petite* she liked to be called — with a face which parlor company deemed

passable, while those in the family, and the many who had had a taste of her real character, considered it actually disagreeable by reason of the petulance and ill-nature, thinly veiled by girl-ish affectations. She had never kept a friend, although she was forever coveting intimacies among her associates, generally selecting the latest comer into the circle as a fit subject for experiment. The rise, decline and fall, of the intercourse between these newly-elected affinities might be predicted with a wonderful degree of accuracy by those who were conversant with the disposition of one of the parties and the inexperience of the other. If Mrs. Boylan boasted truly that she had never quarrelled with any one, her daughter assuredly did a double and treble share of this warm and lively work. If she troubled her memory with such memoranda, her list of discarded and alienated favorites must have equalled in number the years she had spent in this unstable world. Her temper was at once fiery, easily aroused, and lastingly vindictive, a phase of disposition that, luckily for the happiness and growth of the human race, is exceedingly rare. As the eldest born, she had been more indulged than the other children during her earlier years, and still retained a considerable degree of influence over her father, partly on account of her energetic administration of household affairs and the consequent increase of bodily comfort to himself, partly from the fact that while she stood in sufficient awe of his harsh and irritable moods to bridle her tongue when tempted to a direct encounter with him, she was, nevertheless, more free in her behavior towards him, more ready to entertain him when he desired a social chat, than was either of the deeper-hearted and more sensitive daughters, who had trembled before his frowns and invectives until fear had well-nigh usurped the place of filial love.

"It seems to me that Tiny grows more outrageous every day," Marian had said to her husband on her return home the previous day.

“What possesses the girl?” he asked.

“The fact that she is no longer a girl, I imagine,” replied his wife, sagaciously. “She is crazy to catch a husband.”

The truth might have been more delicately revealed, but it *was* the truth. The civilized world holds not a class of beings who are more to be commiserated than the sisterhood of undeniably old maids, who are such from necessity, and not choice. To avoid this doom, Miss Boylan had striven from twenty to twenty-five, with anxious hope — from twenty-five to thirty, with agonizing endeavor. Without beauty, she craved the incense offered at the shrine of personal loveliness; without high mental endowments, she thought herself entitled to the respectful homage due to genius; totally destitute of amiability, she was yet envious of the loving admiration that followed her younger sister's steps.

Oh! it is sad! terrible! this never-to-be-satisfied craving for the good one has not the ability to win, the merit to deserve, nor the capacity to value aright! We are apt to imagine that deficiency or unworthiness has a corresponding influence upon the desires, whereas Nature is, in fact, seldom thus compassionate in her dispensations. Tiny wanted some one to worship and maintain her every whit as much as Marian did. If love and protection were not essentials of her existence, as they were of Maggie's, she was yet fully awake to the consciousness that they would be very pleasant accompaniments of her daily life, and she shrank with loathing from the odium that attaches itself to single blessedness. Yet Marian had been eagerly sought and exultingly won within a year after she entered society, and must, to add insult to injury, take a house within a stone's throw of her father's residence, as if on purpose to tantalize her slighted senior with the spectacle of her wedded bliss.

And here to-night was little Maggie “hardly old enough to

be out of the nursery," as Tiny had represented to her father for two years past, in opposition to Marian's assertions that it was time that she was "out"—that "little piece of nonsense and insipidity" assuming a woman's dress and a woman's place in the world!

"The baby will be thinking of getting married next, I suppose!" she said, sarcastically to Marian, whose eulogiums upon the *débutante's* appearance were perhaps the more profuse because of Tiny's annoyance.

"Of course!" Marian's eyes sparkled with fun. "It is her manifest destiny. Such a face and such a heart will attract wooers, thick as the leaves in Vallambrosa. It is a plain case of cause and effect."

Tiny tossed her head. "I pity the man who becomes the possessor of your very salable bit of finery! But I have no doubt you are correct in supposing that there will be offers for it. Men are always taken in by such 'sweet, pretty' articles without stopping to examine the quality of their bargains."

"Who can blame them, my dear? You wouldn't have them prefer shop-worn and faded commodities, would you?" said Marian, with the most innocent smile imaginable.

"Ever since the world began,
It's always been the way"—

Hasn't it, Will?"

"Has not what?" asked her husband, throwing himself upon the sofa beside her.

"Have not all men a propensity to love beautiful and good women, and pass by the less lovely!"

"I should say that it depends upon the taste of the lover. The ugliest and sourest visaged women I ever saw had a husband who adored her. He thanked Providence, he said, for the diversity of likings among mankind, since, but for this wise provision of Nature, every man would want his Polly."

They all laughed, for the little anecdote was told during a lull in Mrs. Boylan's talk with Maggie, and the less friendly dialogue between the married and single sister. A ring at the door was heard at this auspicious moment. Mrs. Boylan arose with a sigh and took her allotted position near the entrance, her features subsiding into the sweet placidity suitable to the occasion. Her husband growled as he stood by her; Marian sat still; Tiny bounced up, shook out her skirts with a nervous twitch, settled herself anew in her tight corsage with another twitch, cast a look at the mirror, opened and flirted her fan, and was ready for exhibition. The fair novice in festal scenes maintained her stand by the pier-glass, unaffected and therefore graceful, her fine bloom heightened by the excitement of anticipated pleasure.

Suspense was soon ended by the appearance of a gentleman of middle stature and a cheerful, frank face, whose carriage had the ease of one used to the gay world, and, in the present circumstances, the cordial familiarity of a friend in a friend's house. Maggie uttered a joyous exclamation, and ran forward to salute him.

"Oh, Mr. Cleveland! I am glad you came so early!"

"You see! she has not the remotest notion of dignity or even propriety!" sneered Tiny aside to Mrs. Ainslie. "Any other girl would have learned how to receive company in a whole year of parlor-boardings."

"Let us see you do the thing up brown now, Tiny!" whispered her brother-in-law. "There is nothing like a living example."

"Which you, as the eldest of us all, should set for that giddy young thing," subjoined Marian, cruelly.

During this by-play, Maggie detained Mr. Cleveland, that she might pour out her enthusiastic thanks for the beautiful bouquet he had sent her that day.

"You see I have given it the post of honor," she said, holding it up in its jewelled cornucopia. "For this" — touching the latter *bijou*, "I shall thank you by and by. I cannot say all I would at one time. But I must tell you now, that the entire gift was almost worthy of the donor!"

She bowed her arch, sparkling face, in a sweeping courtesy of mock reverence, and stepped back to let him speak to the others.

"Bravo, Maggie!" said Mr. Ainslie, in a subdued tone, clapping a noiseless "*encore*" with his gloved hands. "The witch has a style of her own — eh, Tiny?"

But Tiny, too, had something to say to Mr. Cleveland, something special and private, for he had to bend to hear it. Her breath fluttered; her words were low; her manner full of meaning. Yet the mere matter of the sentence was commonplace enough.

"They are very lovely. I thank you for them!" she said, looking down at the flowers in her hand, as if every bud were a gem of untold value.

Mr. Cleveland smiled. "I am satisfied if they please you."

It was an imprudent speech in one who ought to have known the lady thus addressed. But it was John Cleveland's practice to say pleasant things, when he could do so conscientiously. He *was* gratified that his gifts were acceptable to both sisters. It was not obligatory upon him to express the different degrees of satisfaction with which he listened to their acknowledgments. So he gave Tiny's mite of a hand a gentle squeeze, as became a favored *habitué* of the mansion, paid his respects smilingly to Mrs. Ainslie, and shook hands with her husband, who said, "How are you now, John?"

These gentlemen were partners in business, and strongly attached to one another by ties of personal friendship. When Will Ainslie was wooing Marian, he brought John along to

keep Tiny out of the way, and to entertain the parents while they were in the parlor. The first six months of this intercourse were perhaps the happiest of Tiny's life. She had often hoped before, that she was on the high road to Hymen's-court, expectations speedily and grievously blasted by the perfidy or insensibility of the supposititious suitors. She had never heard a tale of love, and had a natural hankering after this experience. As week after week still saw the friends steady visitors of the Misses Boylan, Tiny dared to be confident of the result. She was less irascible by day, and her eyes prevented the night-watches with waking visions of the coming glory dawning upon her woful singlehood. Then came a shock. Mr. Ainslie spoke, and Mr. Cleveland was mute. Marian was engaged with the full approbation of her family and friends, and no one seemed more pleased at the betrothal, excepting, of course, the parties most nearly interested in the affair, than did Will's partner. He came as frequently as before; talked business with Mr. Boylan; brought novels to the indolent mother; frolicked and studied school-books with Maggie, a merry, winsome nymph of sixteen; chatted gravely or gayly with Tiny, as her will inclined — but, alas! never sentimentally! What ailed the man? Once a bright idea struck her. He was faint-hearted and dubious as to the answer he would receive if he declared his mind. Her maidenly modesty had misled him. She must be more encouraging in her demeanor. And encourage him, she did, to that extent that he stayed away from the house for four whole weeks without the pretence of an apology. After this voluntary banishment, he gradually resumed his old standing, with no show of unusual reserve, and the alarmed Tiny resolved to be more cautious.

Marian was married, and Maggie sent down to the city to "finish her education" at a famous institute, where young ladies were varnished in the most approved fashion and at the highest

prices, and the phase of things at home underwent some alteration. Mr. Cleveland met Miss Boylan oftener at her brother-in-law's than in her father's house; yet while there was less to feed her forlorn hope, there was nothing in particular to dampen it, unless it were his continued and inexplicable silence upon the one topic. It is astonishing how obstinately a woman will, in such circumstances, cling to the ghost of a chance of finally securing the game she is pursuing. Mr. Cleveland was, as Tiny knew — but trusted that he did not — two years younger than herself; popular and respected; with a warm heart, a clear head, and sunny temper; in many, in most respects, her antipodes. He would not be likely to meet rejection from any youthful and pretty woman whose affections were not previously engaged. Why, if marriage were an object with him, should he be spending the best years of his manhood in a slow courtship of one so little charming as herself?

Once or twice, Marian, in revolving this question, and seeing, with her usual penetration, the futility of her sister's dreams, had, in genuine kindness, tried to open the latter's eyes to the truth. A tempestuous scene was, in each case, the consequence of her well meant interference, terminated by a request from Tiny that Mrs. Ainslie would, for the future, confine her attention to her own affairs and leave those of others alone. Mr. Cleveland was a favorite with Marian, and she would have regretted, for his sake, his entanglement with Tiny. She had long since ceased to fear this; still, she thought him unnecessarily polite to her, and frequently found herself wishing that the panther-temper would fly out and end the apparent intimacy. This had never occurred. Tiny's amiability before his face was both amusing and pitiable to behold, when one saw how ineffectual her sacrifices would eventually prove. She kept him by her now, by rapid questions and direct appeals for opinion and information, until the rooms were nearly filled.

The Boylans lived in one of the country towns inhabited by city people, that line the Hudson for many miles above New York. Most of their guests on this occasion were from the last-named place, and all the appointments of the entertainment were equally removed from rustic incompleteness. By dint of keeping a close watch upon opportunity, Mr. Cleveland at length effected his escape from the immediate neighborhood of his fair adorer, and crossed over to where the Ainslies stood, still together, and conversing as contentedly as though they had never promised openly to "cleave to one another." John was no interruption to their lively talk.

"I am advising my wife to undertake the compilation of the next Directory," said Mr. Ainslie. "Without being unkind, her running commentary upon arrivals is instructive and amusing."

"That is because you never trouble yourself to remember people's names and histories," returned his wife. "Mr. Cleveland will set me down as a regular scandal-monger, whereas I only tell you whose children, uncles, aunts, and cousins some of these friends are."

"I am not sure that a veritable pedigree of their families would not be the greatest insult you could offer to many members of our most fashionable assemblies," said John. "Few men, in our democratic country, can afford the luxury of a grandfather."

"Fie! who is the satirist, now?" replied Marian, reprovingly. "I assure you that every person here is, to the best of my knowledge, eminently respectable."

"Oh! no doubt of it! certainly!" Mr. Cleveland assented mechanically.

His regards were fixed upon a group that formed an animated tableau in the centre of the apartment. A tall, dashing girl, dressed in the height of the mode, held Maggie by both

hands in the seeming rapture of greeting. Her eyes were very black, her cheeks very red, her teeth very white, and she showed them a great deal. She had entered upon the arm of a young man, who stood now by her, and directly in front of Maggie. He was handsome, so far as features and coloring went, and irreproachable in dress, yet there was that in his expression and bearing that impressed John with the idea that he was not a gentleman, according to his estimate of true breeding and character. This idea may have been suggested by the slight and habitual curl of the upper lip, not the curve of pride, but that more objectionable and peculiar one that seems always sniffing at some unpleasant odor, which the olfactories are doomed to perceive continually. Or it may have been that his steady gaze down into the eyes of the maiden hostess displeased the looker-on. True, he had himself looked into these same hazel orbs half an hour before, longer than was actually required by the circumstances of their meeting, and found the operation decidedly pleasant, but the like act was daring, positively rude, in a stranger, such as this fellow must be. John could not have told why he did not satisfy his curiosity upon this head, by a question concerning the presumptuous cavalier. He asked, instead : —

“ Do you know, Mrs. Ainslie, who that lady is ? ”

“ It is Marie Dupont — Maggie’s most intimate friend at school. Have you never seen her before ? ”

“ I think not. Is she French ? ”

“ Her father was. Her mother is a widow now ; they live in an elegant villa, about three miles below, a little back from the river.”

“ She is handsome.”

“ Yes, and very stylish. She is hardly the sort of girl whom one would expect our little Maggie to affiliate with, yet I dare say that she is very good in her way. All school-girls cultivate these deathless friendships.”

“Average longevity — six weeks !” said John, smiling.

He was struggling to surmount his ridiculous reluctance to allude to Miss Dupont’s escort, when Mr. Ainslie spared him the effort.

“Is that her brother with her ?”

“Oh, no ! it is a Mr. Lorraine — an admirer, I suspect, although Maggie is very prudent in her revelations on this subject — as in honor bound. He drove Miss Dupont up here, once last year. They, at least, are, to all appearance, a well-matched pair.”

“Both ‘fast’ — hey ?” said her husband.

“Rather !” was the reply, as Mrs. Ainslie turned away to mingle with her sisters’ guests.

It was not long before Mr. Cleveland presented himself at Maggie’s side. She was still with Miss Dupont and her attendant, but looked up with a bright, sweet smile, at John’s approach.

“You anticipate my errand, I perceive,” he said, offering his hand. “The band is calling us to the floor. You remember your promise to immortalize me by giving me the first set.”

Maggie’s color deepened, then faded with surprise and consternation.

“Did I ?” she stammered. “I forgot !”

“My memory is more faithful, or the subject is of more importance to me than to you. The engagement is two months old. It was made the very day I learned that this party was a fixed fact.”

He spoke gayly, more to reassure her than from the lightness of his own spirits.

“I am very sorry ! I have just told Mr. Lorraine that I would dance with him. Mr. Lorraine — Mr. Cleveland !”

The gentlemen bowed stiffly.

"It was very careless — very forgetful — inexcusable in me, Mr. Cleveland," Maggie went on. "If you gentlemen will excuse me, I had rather not dance at all this set. Then, nobody can feel slighted."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Miss Dupont, in a high, loud key, that set John's teeth on edge. "Not open the ball when you make your *début*! My child! who ever heard of such a shocking thing!"

"I am to understand, then, that you have made an engagement that conflicts with my happiness?" said Mr. Cleveland, so calmly and kindly that Maggie's fluttering sensibly abated.

"Permit me, sir!" Mr. Lorraine interposed. "Miss Boylan has done me the infinite honor to promise me her hand for the set now about to form. If priority of claim is the question to be disposed of, I believe that my right cannot be disputed. Four months since — four months and four days; I like to be exact, you see — Miss Boylan was passing the Sabbath with her friend, Miss Dupont. The subject of this festal occasion was introduced. It was spoken of as the indispensable *finale* of school-life, and the prelude to freedom and social enjoyments. Upon the spot, I solicited the boon, her granting of which has created this little discussion. Miss Dupont will substantiate my statement, if necessary."

His pompous affectation and complacent air confirmed John in the prejudice he had conceived against him at sight.

"A tale so succinct and probable needs no corroboration, sir," he said, rather haughtily. "Nor was it my intention to discuss the matter at all. The simple expression of Miss Boylan's wishes was all that I sought."

With a bow in which there was no perceptible mingling of wounded pride, he left them, and the triumphant Lorraine led out his blushing partner. Blushing, but not with pleasure. There was a troubled look upon her brow that accorded neither

with the ruling spirit of the hour, nor the fancy of her attendant.

"I shall regret my declaration of rights if it has interfered with your inclination," he said, bending towards Maggie's ear.

Her glance was eager and truthful. "You know better than that! I am only sorry that Mr. Cleveland is disappointed — perhaps offended."

"He has no right to be — at any rate *you* have done nothing that should make him angry. You really forgot that you had promised to dance with him."

"The only doubt is —" said Maggie, hesitatingly, "whether it was right — I would say best — to bring forward a prior engagement —"

"Which never existed?" Lorraine completed the sentence. "The spirit, if not the letter of the compact, was not a fiction. I have a distinct recollection of a vow I registered, that most delightful of all Sabbath evenings, that mine should be the nearest place to you in this very scene. While you and Marie were chanting the praises of liberty, I was holding out my hands — figuratively speaking — for the fetters Cupid was preparing."

The dance began, and several minutes elapsed ere Lorraine secured an opportunity to conclude.

"Granting that I invented the story entire, does not the good Book say that the end sanctifies the means?"

"Not that I ever read!" laughed Maggie, and they were again separated by the figure of the set.

The tempter was satisfied that his sophistry, however shallow, had fallen, like delicious music, upon her heart, and — not that he was forgiven, for she would never have dreamed of charging him with wrong-doing, but that her conscience was quieted.

A want of courage in speaking, even more than in action,

was Maggie Boylan's weakest point. The original texture of her moral constitution, although firmer than was her mother's, yet bore sufficient resemblance to it to call for great watchfulness and healthful toning on the part of those to whom her training was intrusted. It would be hard to decide who had most to do with making this latent canker palpable and chronic, — the silly mother, the harsh father, or the petulant sister. All had their share in the work together, and did it so thoroughly that they blamed one another for having, as Mr. Boylan phrased it, "taken from the girl's disposition the little backbone Nature gave it." She shrank from contention and avoided its causes. A difference of opinion angered her father and worried Tiny — therefore Maggie suppressed her sentiments, and seemed to adopt theirs. They were resolute in holding to their own way; she meekly followed where they led until she almost forgot how to walk alone. Marian fought against the like subjugation in her case, and, thanks to her paternal inheritance of intellect and will, succeeded in maintaining her individuality. But even she unintentionally increased Maggie's dependence by taking up the gauntlet in her behalf, whenever her pet was assailed in her presence.

This passivity under a prompt or plausible decision on the part of others had caused Maggie to acquiesce in Lorraine's ready falsehood, quite as much as had her preference for this one of the rival claimants for her hand. A feeling of responsibility was an unknown sensation to her. She was wax in any strong grasp, a delicate and pure material, very pleasant to the touch and beautiful to the eye — but only wax, after all.

It was easier to put aside her scruples concerning her tacit assent to the invention that had gained Lorraine the victory, than to reply without faltering to Mrs. Ainslie's inquiry, as she encountered her some time later in the evening.

"I thought Mr. Cleveland told me that you were engaged

to him for the first set, Maggie. I never was more surprised in my life than when I saw him dancing with Tiny instead."

"I had forgotten a promise to Mr. Lorraine," answered Maggie, her lip trembling like a child's. "I have been so unhappy —" and the brown eyes were overcast.

"Never mind!" Marian laid her hand caressingly upon her shoulder. "Nothing must make you sad to-night. Was John displeased?"

"I am afraid so!" Maggie fingered her bouquet in perturbation, that, for certain reasons of her own, was very pleasing to Mrs. Ainslie.

"That was very silly in him. He must not be so easily huffed. I will speak to him and make it all right."

"Oh! if you only would!" exclaimed Maggie, with real joy, for the idea of being at variance with her old friend was very painful, whenever she allowed herself to dwell upon it. "You are the best sister in the world!"

Mrs. Ainslie set off upon her embassy of peace, meditating, with amused gratification, upon the guileless transparency of character that thus suffered the workings of the deepest feelings to be revealed.

CHAPTER III.

MR. CLEVELAND had had a succession of partners, all alike indifferent to him, and having conducted the last one to her seat, spoken the few nothings that etiquette required, and picked up the handkerchief she had dropped, the usual accident on such occasions, was bowing himself off, when he caught Mrs. Ainslie's eye. In obedience to its mute behest, he made his way to her without delay.

"I bring you an olive-branch," she said, playfully. "Our poor little Maggie is terribly grieved, because she is convinced that her forgetfulness has made an enemy of you for life. Surely you know her better than to believe her capable of wilful offence to you or any one else. She is giddy and hasty, like other girls, and has almost atoned for her fault by the pain she has suffered since it was committed. It has quite marred the pleasure of her party. She came near making a Niobe of herself, when she confided to me the fact of your displeasure, and her penitence."

"My displeasure, as you term it, was not with her," replied John, whose heart had grown lighter with every word of this address. "I could have wished, I confess, that since I was to be forgotten, my more fortunate competitor had been a different personage from Mr. Lorraine."

"But you understand how that happened?" interrupted Mrs. Ainslie. "He, as Miss Dupont's *fiancé*, is according to

Maggie's notion, entitled to especial kindness from the prospective bridemaid."

"Ah! that view of the case had not occurred to me!" Mr. Cleveland's brow was all clear and bright again. "Will it be necessary for me to make my peace upon my bended knee, do you think?" he turned back to ask.

"You need not try it, except as a *dernier ressort*," she rejoined. "Will!" she tapped her husband's arm with her fan, — "I have made an agreeable discovery — one likely to be highly advantageous to all parties concerned. Ask me about it when we go home."

Maggie did not observe Mr. Cleveland's approach, and her start and confused exclamation at the sound of his voice were sweet flattery.

"Maggie!" it said, in his customary gentle tone — always most gentle to her, albeit she might not detect its different cadence, "I have waited very patiently for my dance. How soon may I have it?"

Her answer was charmingly irrelevant. "And you are really not angry with me? How very good you are!"

"How very wicked I would be to lose my temper for so slight a cause, you ought to say! And you have really and soberly thought that you had banished me for the whole evening! My question still waits for a reply. How stand the tablets now?"

"I am free for the next set. That is nice! And I promise never to forget you again while I live!"

He replied by taking her bouquet-holder — his present — and silently directing her attention to a wreath of Forget-me-nots, set with turquoises, twined about the golden cup, and the treaty was consummated.

He danced twice with her, and had the additional bliss of handing her in to supper, none of which privileges might be

regarded as distinguished marks of favor, but he was supremely happy in their enjoyment. So amiable was he rendered thereby, that he went, after his second dance with Maggie, and solicited Miss Dupont's hand for whatever set was most agreeable to her. Miss Marie was very gracious, and professed to be disconsolate that she had not one vacancy upon her list, except for the last dance, from which she had already excused herself to several gentlemen, on account of a Polka, which was to follow it immediately.

"And if I expect to do myself justice in waltzing, I must rest awhile first. I dote upon *la valse*, — Schottisch, Redowa, polkas of all species!"

She went on talking volubly, and John, naturally interested in learning somewhat of the character of Maggie's bosom friend, willingly stayed to listen and judge. He caught himself marvelling, ere long, how so artless and upright a girl as his favorite could fancy the companionship of this piece of artificiality and *quasi* sentimentality.

"Just the woman who would read Sue and George Sand by stealth, and jump out of a window to marry a Polish barber!" he said to himself. "This intimacy cannot endure many months," and his thoughts leaped daringly forward to muse upon the changes oftentimes wrought by the "expulsive power of a new affection" — when Marie said, dropping her voice to a confidential pitch: —

"Is not Maggie an angel?"

Mr. Cleveland colored like a boy accused of his trial love affair.

"She is very pretty!" he recovered himself so far as to say.

"Very pretty! You ungallant creature! can you say no more? Is it want of appreciation, or" — casting a bold, meaning glance at his face — "the fear lest you should be betrayed into saying too much?"

x

This was going ahead rather fast for a ten minutes' acquaintance, even had Miss Dupont been the kind of person he would have intrusted with a tender secret. Therefore, with that semblance of frank surprise that best veils the real feelings, John looked her straight in the eyes.

"Afraid of saying what I think about my old playfellow — the Maggie whom I have known and petted for years! That would be too absurd!"

"Yes! I know you are sworn friends. She regards you quite as a godfather. Shall I own it? before I saw you, I imagined you, from her description, to be fifty at the youngest, a gray-haired bachelor in spectacles, with a red bandanna handkerchief in one hand and a box of bonbons in the other. Was it not a ridiculous notion?"

"That is for you to decide," said Mr. Cleveland, with rather an unsuccessful attempt at a laugh. Was he, then, so ancient, so very much older and graver than herself, in Maggie's estimation?

"She is the dearest little thing in the round world!" pursued Marie. "We are never happy apart, and I am to have her with me, half the time, now she has done with that horrid Institute. I graduated a year ago, but we have seen each other every week since. This will be a heavenly winter for us both. I hope her godfather will not neglect her while she is in her other home. Her friends will always be as welcome as mine, in my mother's house."

"If I ever cross the threshold, I give you leave to shoot me on the spot!" was the hearer's mental ejaculation. He said aloud, "Thank you!" and bowed.

The floor was cleared for a waltz, and Mr. Lorraine came up very seasonably to end the interview.

"I have given him a lesson he won't forget in a hurry," said Marie to her friend, as he passed his arm around her waist

in the fashionable embrace licensed by our "best society" as both graceful and innocent.

"I am sorry you took that trouble," was the reply. "A spirited rivalry makes these affairs more interesting — keeps up the excitement. I flatter myself, moreover, that I would prove no mean antagonist for this 'very superior — this excellent young man,' as I heard two old ladies call him, just now."

They were off! whirling and skimming, floating and sinking, with a dexterity that argued diligent and joint practice, round and round, steadily and unflaggingly, not a false step, not an angular movement, the lady's eyes brighter and blacker, her half smile just affording a glimpse of her white teeth; her partner easy and self-assured, yet plainly conscious of his present importance in the sight of the observers. Such were soon many of those who had entered the mazy circle with them. One couple after another withdrew from the maelstrom in prudence or weariness, the remaining dancers becoming more conspicuous, as each pair dropped off, until Mr. Lorraine and his companion had the whole floor to themselves. Still the gliding whirl went on; still the lady's light feet skimmed the floor, as a sea-bird's the waves, and the firm, elastic step of her cavalier was regular as at the first round. They coveted notice and admiration, and they had it. They cared not a straw for adverse criticism, sneering envy, or grave disapprobation, and they received these also in profusion.

"Sound in wind! No question about that!" observed Mr. Carvill, a brother merchant, who held Mr. Boylan's button in a snug corner. "Pair of fancy nags. Step high!"

"Miss Dupont — is it not?" Mr. Boylan screwed up his eyelids, being rather short-sighted, so as to get a better look at the waltzers. "Who is that with her?"

"Name is Lorraine. Book-keeper for Lawrence & Co. *Protegé* of Lawrence, Senior. Fair salary. Spends money

like a nabob. Drives fast horse. Gives and takes oyster-suppers. Champagne, cards. Nights when there are no parties, faro-bank. Lawrence thinks it's all straight. Isn't *my* clerk. None of my business. Isn't engaged to *my* daughter. That couldn't be!"

This string of laconicisms, which was delivered with great deliberation, and punctuated by knowing nods and an odd purse of the mouth, would have occasioned the discharge of any official in Mr. Boylan's employ, however strong his confidence in him up to that time had been, and the same might have been affirmed of nine out of ten of Mr. Carvill's acquaintances. He was a shrewd, hard man, who never said anything he was not sure of, and when he did speak, his terse, aphoristic sentences had the sound and weight of oracles.

"He is engaged to Miss Dupont, I hear," said Mr. Boylan. "Hasn't she a father, or brother, or guardian — somebody to look after her? She is too clever a girl to be allowed to throw herself away in this manner."

"Father dead. Brothers younger than herself. Mother gay, rich widow. May marry again. Four children. Marie real head of family. Smart as a steel-trap. Smartest of us do silly things sometimes. Hardest thing in nature to manage is a woman whose head is set upon marrying a scamp."

"If she were my daughter I would manage her!" said Mr. Boylan, and he really looked as if he could. "I would lock her up and feed her on bread and water for a year, before she should disgrace me by bringing this worthless puppy into the family. But, as I asked before — hasn't the girl a guardian?"

"Mother nominal guardian. Executrix too."

"Was her father a born fool, that he made such a will?"

"Sharp fellow in most matters. Would cheat you out of your eye teeth if you did not look out. You remember him. Old Adolph Dupont, Wall Street."

"Indeed! He did not lack sense. Was he in his dotage when he drew up his will?"

"Gray mare the better horse!" said Mr. Carvill, drily.

Mr. Boylan replied even more sententiously, "More fool he!"

"I flatter myself that we have created a sensation for once," whispered Lorraine, as one final, sweeping whirl brought the performance to a close, and he conducted Marie, flushed, but, as she declared loudly, unwearied, to a seat.

Maggie pressed forward to congratulate her. "You have achieved wonders to-night, my love."

Mr. Lorraine's bow showed that he appropriated a share of the compliment.

They had together accomplished divers things which were destined to exert an important influence upon the future of more than one person there present. First and foremost, John Cleveland felt that it was high time he threw off the mask of the elderly friend, and paid open suit to the girl he had loved for four years. The bud he had watched, and nurtured and dreamed over, was at length unfolded, and there were those who might account his constancy of devotion, his patient waiting and considerate reserve, as nothing in the contest for the prize now displayed to the general gaze. Secondly, he had conceived a distrust of Miss Dupont and a dislike for her reputed betrothed, and resolved to withdraw Maggie from their influence as soon as he had the right and opportunity. They, on the other hand, without suspecting this one of his designs, agreed in singling him out as the man whose pretensions to her hand were likely to be soonest asserted, and most strongly seconded by her relatives.

Tiny had picked up quite a store of sweet crums, compliments, attentions, etc., the fact of Mr. Cleveland's having chosen her as his earliest partner being the largest and richest of the

collection. She reviewed these acquisitions to her stock of mementoes, as she went through her minute and old-maidish preparations for bed, at three in the morning, and felt that she had made some progress in the tedious journey towards a change of name. Marian had adroitly insinuated a bitter drop by her praises of Maggie, before and after the ball, but this was fairly neutralized by Miss Dupont and her fascinating escort.

"My dear Miss Tiny," Marie had said at parting, "we young people must be very sociable this season, and I foresee that you and I will have to be the mainsprings in the good work. Maggie is new and shy, and not altogether so energetic as we are. *This energy is not a bad thing after all — is it? I don't know how society would get on but for such brave spirits as ours. We must contrive frequent family parties, drives, and excursions. And pray use your influence" — with an expressive smile — "to induce your knight, Mr. Cleveland, to join our band."

"How unlike members of the same family sometimes are!" Mr. Lorraine remarked during the single set which he bestowed at Marie's instigation, upon Tiny, that astute diplomatist having apprised him of the expediency of conciliating the stinging nettle of the household Boylan. "You three sisters belong to as many different orders of beauty. Yours is the sylph-like, the ethereal; Miss Maggie is a plump Hebe, and Mrs. Ainslie looks the literary lady to perfection. Her stateliness, undoubtedly, proceeds partly from her superiority in age. It is the air of authority which the eldest of a family insensibly acquires."

"Oh, she is decidedly the blue of the trio!" returned the sylph, radiantly. "We are very proud of Marian's talents."

Mr. Boylan had likewise his opinion of the dashing French couple, one which he would not have altered at the bidding of all the women, and all, save one, of the men in both hemi-

spheres. As he had no present call to think or speak of it, he locked it away in his faithful strong-box, memory, in case it should ever be needed. No harm could come of the continuance of such intercourse as now existed between his girls and Miss Dupont. If, after her marriage, Lorraine's evil courses menaced his social position or business standing, the acquaintance "must be broken off, instant!" This was his way of stating the process of disrupting the eternal friendship avowed by the schoolmates. So long as his children associated with those of their own rank in life, it was not his province to inquire into the private histories of their companions. "Women must have confidants and cronies, and all that kind of stuff, to gossip and cry with," he reasoned. "Only they must never bother me with their tales and quarrels." Thus dismissing this trivial subject, he set himself about the arduous task of extorting Mr. Carvill's judgment upon a certain promising, but rather new railroad stock, then exciting the noble minds of speculators.

And our heroine — for insipid as she may be esteemed by others beside Tiny — an unremarkable, merely pretty girl, with a soft heart and not particularly stout brain, with little to recommend her beyond feeling and sweetness of temper, ladylike manners, buoyant spirits and a fair stock of intelligence, unless we appeal to the sordid, by adding her prospect of receiving a comfortable fortune from her father — such as she was, Maggie is our heroine — what thoughts carried she to her rest? There was a full moon, and it showed quite distinctly the rosy face nestled among the white pillows. The brown eyes were large and thoughtful, but not sad. Anything but that! She was dreaming over the events of the evening, too excited and happy to sleep. She needed not Tiny's emphatic proclamation, as the last carriage drove off. "Thank gracious! It is over, and it has been a complete success!"

Of what she did not say, but modest as Maggie was, she did not affect to deny to herself that *she* had not been a failure. Her experience to-night was but the harbinger of continued enjoyment. She had the stamp of popularity, and henceforward, her course was easy. She had outshone Tiny, pleased her father, almost interested her mother, and delighted Marian. But none of these reflections kindled that light in her eye, summoned that tender smile to her lips. "He says that he is proud of me!" she whispered to herself, in a kind of timid exultation, and she repeated it aloud, as if to assure herself that she had indeed heard praise she scarcely dared receive. "Proud of me! of his silly little Maggie! Ought not I to be the happiest girl alive?"

CHAPTER IV.

"MAGGIE is going to spend to-morrow with me, Ma," said Marian, one evening, about a month after the party.

This was the most respectful form of asking permission ever employed by Mrs. Boylan's children towards her. The wonder was that they thought it worth while to keep up this poor pretence of consulting her as to their movements.

She sat now by the drop-light, in an easy-chair, a warm shawl wrapped about her, and her feet on a cushion, reading a purple-covered pamphlet, the vignette being a coarse wood-cut of a frantic female, brandishing a knife a foot and a half long over a sleeping infant—the title, in staring capitals—"Sinning Sybil, or the Blotted Book." Milk-and-water as was her nature, nothing would serve her turn in literature but the thrillingly tragic, the monstrously improbable. Perhaps nothing else kept her awake. She absorbed, like a greedy sponge, streams of such trash as is pronounced by stomachs of a higher tone to be turbid and nauseous; a slow poison, when it does not act as an emetic. Her lymphatic temperament prevented any unhappy effects of this diet upon her nerves, nor was it ever intimated by the most slanderous, that her morals suffered thereby, although intrigues, robberies, poisonings, and suicides infested every page.

She looked up placidly, in the midst of a midnight adventure, where the hero had just caught a glimpse, by a flash of lightning, of the assassin's poniard aimed at his heart.

"What did you say, Marian, love?"

Mrs. Ainslie repeated her remark.

"Certainly, my dear, if you and she wish it, and Maggie will wrap up warmly. It is very cold!" And she slid back into her romance.

"Anything special?" asked Tiny, in her sharp way.

"Yes. I want Maggie's company, and she is not averse to mine," replied Marian.

"There is nothing uncommon in that, if one tries to believe in the nonsensical parade of affection you keep up for one another," retorted Tiny, breaking her sewing-silk with a jerk. "It is all very pretty in company, but when one sees it every day, it becomes sickening — actually disgusting!"

"Come, Tiny! don't fly into a passion because I happen to love Maggie better than I do you. I can't help it, you know," said Marian, quietly.

"I don't ask you to help it! Gracious knows, I wouldn't have people fawning and flattering around me, as they do to her, for any sum you could offer me. It is not in my line, I am glad to say."

"As you remark, it does not appear to be in your line," answered Mrs. Ainslie. "But it is news to me that you rejoice in not being a belle. It shows how mistaken one can be. I have imagined, hitherto, that you would like to be admired and sought after. It is a comfort to me that I have learned my error. I have wasted a vast amount of pity."

Tiny drew her breath and her thread very hard.

"You will come early, will you not, Maggie dear?" said Marian, taking up her cloak from the chair where she had dropped it. "I want a nice, long day."

"Another dinner-party, I suppose?" said Tiny, unable to keep her tongue still.

"By no means! or you would be invited too. I do mean

to give another some time, and leave Maggie out. It was too unkind in her to eclipse you as she did last week. It was not strange that you called my unpretending little entertainment 'a stupid failure.'"

Tiny nearly choked. One would have thought that the least grain of common sense would have withheld her from these perpetual tilting-matches, in which she inevitably came off second best; but the peppery demon that possessed her small body would not let her remain quiescent under defeat.

"And you hope to make the belle contented for an entire day without a single beau, do you? She is as cross as a bear when she has to spend one evening at home and nobody drops in."

"O Tiny!" uttered Maggie, appealingly.

"Poor child!" said Marian. "It must be hard to bear! I have had some experience of these dismal no-company nights. Pa, asleep under the evening paper upon the lounge; Ma, hidden behind a purple or yellow cover; Tiny, sulking and drowsy, or counting the stitches in her embroidery — you cannot magnify the dolefulness of the picture. By the way, Tiny, for what favored admirer are those elegant slippers intended?"

"That is no concern of yours that I can see!" returned Tiny, growing crosser each second.

"Certainly not, my dear. You are right there. I ought not to have asked the question. A moment's reflection would have showed me how difficult it would be for you to reply to an inquiry thus worded. Good-night Ma. Say the same to Pa for me when he awakes. Remember Maggie, darling, you are to come over soon after breakfast."

Had Tiny surmised the true reason for this pressing invitation, she would have retired that night in a worse temper than was provoked by Marian's sarcasms. The morrow was John Cleveland's birthday, and Mrs. Ainslie having ascertained this

accidentally a week before, had made him promise to eat his anniversary dinner at her table. She and Maggie had each prepared a present for him, as had also Tiny — with this difference, theirs were manufactured by stealth, to be offered openly — hers, the slippers she was finishing this evening, were ostentatiously exhibited, while they were being wrought, and destined to be sent by mail without the knowledge of any other mortal besides herself and the honored recipient. Mrs. Ainslie's gift was a dressing-gown of superb pattern, beautifully quilted and trimmed, and Maggie's a Turkish smoking-cap to match.

John's gratification and surprise were an abundant recompense to the two latter donors for their efforts to please him.

"This is very kind — too kind!" he said, over and over again, trying to smile while his eyes were glistening. "You will make me forget that I am a poor sisterless bachelor, living in lodgings, with no one to provide for me these blessed — falsely so-called minor comforts of life."

"Just what you ought to forget, old fellow!" said Mr. Ainslie, laying his arm across his shoulder. "While I have a home, it is yours. And now to dinner, as one of the major comforts of the inner man!"

In this repast, John's tastes had been likewise consulted. His favorite dishes were there, prepared in the finest style; Mr. and Mrs. Ainslie, whom he rightly counted among his best friends, presided over the feast, and Maggie sat opposite to him. No one but a perversely unreasonable and ungrateful man could be otherwise than contented in the circumstances, and Mr. Cleveland, who had a habit of looking on the bright side of everything, felt and said that this was one of the sunniest spots in his life. Maggie had donned a dress, for which he had once expressed a liking, and this trifling instance of her regard was not lost upon him. She was very joyous, very pretty, very

gentle — in his sight, the loveliest embodiment of a household fairy he had ever beheld.

And when, after dinner, Will took him into the lawless sanctum, the library — forced him to assume the new gown and cap, while he arrayed himself in similar habiliments, installed him in a stuffed chair before the glowing grate, and produced a couple of prime Havanas, while Maggie who “liked the odor of a fine cigar,” followed her sister into the room, and took a low seat in the corner, just where the red firelight, and the soft lustre of the shaded burner, above the centre-table, united in showing her face and form to the fairest advantage, what was there to hinder John from a bit of mental sketching, that kept him silent with deep, deep happiness?

What if this were truly a family party? if he were receiving his friends in his home, instead of being entertained by them, and the mistress of that home were she who sat there beside the hearth? Would her air of cheerful content be lessened, her fresh, sweet face be dimmer if the dream-picture were a reality? He said to himself, even in the unspoken ecstasy of his imaginings, that rather than bring a cloud over that dear young head, he would leave his love to the last untold; rather than grieve that loving, innocent heart, he would himself give her away at the altar to another. Maggie could have had no more certain proof of the depth and disinterestedness of his attachment than was brought out in these musings. He had no mawkish melancholic sentiment in his composition. His forte was not the romantic. Had Will and Marian been out of the way, he would have desired no more auspicious time and circumstances for the momentous declaration than this domestic nook and this birthday eve. Moonlight rambles and poetic quotations were, as Tiny said of herself, in another respect, “not in his line.” He would have drawn his chair closer to Maggie’s, and taking her hand, told her how long and

well he had loved her, and asked for some assurance that he had not loved and waited in vain. Then — and a quicker pulse-throb brought before him the former picture — the present — had but the magic words of mutual love passed between them, and a common blessing been uttered above them. Home! wife! peace! Sweet synonyms that sum up the rapturous emotions of many a satisfied heart!

“Ting-a-ling-ling!”

“Mercy upon us!” said Marian, putting her hands to her ears. “What an impetuous ring! Show no one in here!” she called to the servant as she passed the library-door.

Maggie started up at the sound of a loud clear voice in the hall.

“Oh, sister, it is Marie!”

Ere Mrs. Ainslie could reply, the door was thrown open by that resolute damsel herself.

“Good-evening to you all! I knew you were in here. I smelt the cigars. I adore them! Oh, how fragrant! What a snug coterie! Maggie, my sweet child, how do you do?” kissing her.

“Take a seat near the fire, Miss Dupont!” said Marian, not very warmly, for she secretly resented the intrusion.

“Thank you! but I have no time to stay. I have come on an errand. It seems hard-hearted in me to break up this very picturesque group, still I must possess myself of one of its ornaments. Maggie, darling, I am here to demand you.”

“Me!” “Her!” exclaimed Maggie and Mrs. Ainslie, in a breath.

“You — my precious! Her — my dear Mrs. Ainslie! I called at your father’s, Maggie, and they directed me to pursue my search in this direction. You wrote me, the other day, that you would run down to me for a night whenever I sent for you. Not caring to trust any messenger, behold me, the

bearer of my own warrant for your arrest. Now, Mrs. Ainslie, don't look grave and doubtful! I am armed with the proper credentials, having done the dutiful thing in asking the consent of your excellent parents. It was given readily and unconditionally, and Miss Tiny very kindly put up a morning-robe and other needful articles in a valise, which I have outside in the carriage. So, hurry, dear — there's a love!"

Maggie stood motionless in a state of perplexed incertitude. Marian's countenance expressed unqualified disapproval of the proposed measure; Will looked surprised and annoyed, while John watched Maggie in anxious suspense. She did wish that Marie had not called for her on this night, and here, but saw no way of refusing without vexing her. She always enjoyed her visits to the Duponts. It would be an act of self-denial to decline this invitation, yet it was not John's birthnight, and Marian counted upon her spending the entire evening with her, and John would feel slighted and Will blame her — "I wish I knew what to do!" she burst forth in distress.

"If you take my advice, you will stay where you are!" said Marian, positively.

"You are our guest for the night, and we cannot excuse you!" added Mr. Ainslie. "You can go down to Mrs. Dupont's with me in the nine o'clock train, to-morrow morning."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Marie. "I have especial reasons why I must have her without delay. My party comes off in three days, and matters of vital importance respecting it are at a stand-still for want of my prime counsellor. Dearest Mrs. Ainslie, do not be inexorable! You were a girl yourself only the other day, and cannot have forgotten how girls feel, situated as Maggie and I are."

This sort of talk would have propitiated Tiny, but Marian was made of different stuff.

"Have you no escort, Miss Dupont?" she inquired.

"Only our coachman, who is the most trustworthy creature living, and a safe driver," was the rejoinder, accompanied, John fancied, by a sudden sly glance at Maggie, who did not observe it.

"That may be, still it appears to me neither prudent nor proper for two young ladies to drive three or four miles at nine o'clock at night, with no attendant except a servant," said Marian, decidedly as before.

"My dear madam, what an idea! Why Thomas has been in our family for ages, and is really a gentleman!" Marie stopped to laugh, perhaps at Mrs. Ainslie's prudery.

"Give yourself no uneasiness on that score, Mrs. Ainslie," interposed John, calmly. "If Miss Maggie decides to go, I shall request Miss Dupont to give me a seat, also, to her mother's door."

"Oh, I could not think of that!" Marie commenced, with a startled look. Then, as if another and a very amusing thought had struck her, she broke into a peal of laughter. "I beg your pardon!" she said, when she could control her mirth — "but it did seem such a preposterous plan! However, if you insist upon straining your gallantry so far, I will not forbid it, although it is a pity you should be put to so much trouble. Now, Maggie, make haste, dear! We can thank Mr. Cleveland on the way home, and we must not not keep him out late."

"How will you get back?" asked Maggie of him, and still hesitating.

"There is a train up at half-past ten, one down at eleven. I can catch one or the other," he answered.

"Come back by all means!" said Mr. Ainslie. "We shall sit up for you."

Maggie ran for her wrappings, and John, stepping into the hall, resumed coat, hat, and boots, with very diverse feelings from those with which he had laid them off.

Mr. Ainslie handed Miss Dupont down the steps, and this gave Maggie a chance to say tremblingly, almost tearfully — “I am so sorry all this has happened, Mr. Cleveland. I wish you would not go. I do nothing but annoy you, now-a-days.”

“Please say no more about it. I much prefer going,” he replied, somewhat coldly. He could not help being disappointed and hurt at this unforeseen close of his *fête*.

It was a moonlight night, and the air was very keen. The coachman walked up and down the semicircular drive in front of the portico, stamping his feet and swinging his arms, to keep himself warm.

“Thomas!” called his mistress.

“Yes, ma’am!”

“Open the carriage-door!”

Maggie had John’s arm, and he felt her start violently as the man spoke — saw her cast a look in his direction, and then drop her head while she trembled all over. But for her agitation, he would not have thought of noticing the fellow particularly, but he scanned him now narrowly. He was muffled in a great coat, with many capes, and a fur collar hid the lower part of his face. He stood holding the open door, in respectful silence, while the ladies got in and seated themselves.

“Stop a moment! this gentleman will escort us home!” said Marie, arresting his movement to shut them in.

The man wheeled sharply around, and met Mr. Cleveland’s full, fixed gaze.

“Close the door, sir!” ordered the latter. “With your permission, Miss Dupont, I will alter my mind. I see that you do not require any further protection.”

His manner hardly astonished Mr. Ainslie more than did Miss Dupont’s silence at this singular change of purpose. Neither she nor Maggie uttered a syllable of inquiry or adieu. The coachman mounted the box, and the carriage rolled away.

Marian had witnessed the departure from the hall door.

"I thought you were going with them!" she said, as her husband and John came up the steps.

"I did intend it."

John said no more until they were again in the library. Then he stood, looking into the fire, for some moments.

"You saw who that fellow was, did you not?" he said, abruptly, to Mr. Ainslie.

"No! what fellow?"

"Miss Dupont's pretended coachman was that young Lorraine!"

"Impossible!" ejaculated Marian.

"You must be mistaken John," said Will, seriously.

"I am not! His height, walk, and voice were enough, if I had not had a distinct view of his countenance, when he wheeled about, as Miss Dupont told him that I was going. It was he, and no one else!"

"I recollect how suddenly he turned, but attributed it to surprise. This is a strange freak!"

"An unladylike trick!" said Mrs. Ainslie, indignantly. "And she would have suffered you to take that cold ride rather than tell the truth!"

"You remember that she did oppose my going; then gave her consent, I imagine, with the idea that the excellence of the joke would be enhanced if Lorraine and myself were both victims."

"Fancy his having to drive the whole way without speaking a word, for fear of betraying himself!" laughed Mr. Ainslie.

"This is no laughing matter, Will," said his wife. "It is either a very witless, school-girlish plot, beneath the dignity of a woman to practise, or there is something deeper in it than we can see. Can it be possible that Maggie had any complicity in it?"

John was silent. He recalled the start that had awakened his suspicions.

"I should be very angry if I believed that she knew in what company she left the house," pursued Marian. "I have no patience with such underhand proceedings."

"Come, come, you are taking this too seriously!" replied her husband. "It was unquestionably a silly affair; but I do not perceive the enormity of the transaction. It was rather poor fun, I should think, yet if Miss Dupont and her beau enjoyed it, why should we object?"

Neither of his auditors was inclined to dismiss the subject so lightly. Marian dwelt upon the disrespect offered to them, and was incensed that such means should have been used to obtain possession of Maggie.

"If Miss Dupont's intention were to hoax her, the discovery cannot but be very embarrassing to the poor child. Think of her surprise when the supposed servant speaks to her! I should be vexed enough to get out and walk back home by myself?"

"Maggie is not so touchy!" returned Mr. Ainslie. "And it is to be presumed that she is well enough acquainted with Miss Marie's ways not to be frightened to death at the dénouement. Another cigar, John! And, Marian, we will have a bowl of punch to console us for the loss of our fireside fairy."

John was not consoled, however well he succeeded in preserving the outside show of equanimity. He was very angry with Miss Dupont, and more so with her puppy of a lover, while with regard to Maggie, he felt a degree of alarm, entirely uncalled for by the seeming facts in the case. The thought of deceit in connection with her conduct was utterly incompatible with what he knew of her pure and artless nature. Her surprise at Marie's entrance and proposition was assuredly not simulated, and granting that she did see through Lorraine's disguise at the moment of departure, consideration for her

friend's feelings would have restrained her from exposing him, then and there. Nor was her silence, when he announced his change of intention, to be set down to aught save the same unselfish dread of annoying Marie, and the confusion which a young, ingenuous girl would naturally feel in such a position. He hoped and said as much, that Mrs. Ainslie would not chide her sister for the folly of her associate, but he hoped as fervently, that which he did not say — viz : that she would not rest until she unravelled the mystery which to his apprehension hung around Maggie's intimacy with this gay, and, as he feared, unscrupulous couple of lovers. *Were* they lovers? What if Marie's intense love of scheming, and the straining after dramatic effect, which entered so largely into her character and actions, were leading her docile, unsophisticated companion into more serious complications than such merry plots as that of this evening!

His heart stood still at the thought. His dove — his own — his undefiled, by even a dream of evil — at the mercy of a bold, designing woman, who made use of the ardent love she had inspired in that guileless bosom for the furtherance of her plans, whatever they might be! He, too, would have a talk with Maggie, and a decisive one. Where else could she find such protection as in the acknowledged devotion of a true and honest heart!

CHAPTER V.

WE will pass over the scene that ensued in the carriage, when the trio recovered from the amazement produced by Mr. Cleveland's unexpected adieu, and present ourselves in Miss Dupont's private sitting-room, just as the little party gathered around the fire, to talk over the matter already discussed at some length in the course of their ride.

Maggie was paler than usual with excitement, and there was a droop of the eyelids and an occasional quiver of the lip, that showed a mind ill at ease. Marie drew her to a lounge, and putting her arms around her, tried to reassure her.

"What if he does tell Will and Marian, and they think so strange of it, little trembler? You have but to state the truth to clear yourself. Say that Marie was always a queer girl, and wanted to play a harmless trick upon you, but that she was very sorry when she found out that you were troubled about it, and promised not to do the like again. What is easier?"

"Nothing, I suppose; but what if they ask if I knew who *he* was before I got into the carriage?"

"Say 'no!'" said Marie, boldly.

"But would that be true?" objected Maggie, stealing a glance at the face, whose owner she had designated by the expressive personal pronoun.

That face was watching hers very intently just then, and its look was the same that had given offence to John Cleveland's

nice notions of the respect due the beloved one, on the night of Maggie's *début*. He smiled, as he caught the furtive light of her eye. He was less handsome in this smile than when his features were in repose, because it heightened the peculiar effect of the curling upper lip, before mentioned. It was as if the unpleasant savor he seemed ever inhaling, had suddenly grown stronger, when — to borrow Dickens' inimitable description of the like effect — "his moustache went up and his nose came down." Yet he was, to a casual observer, a splendid-looking man, tall, well-made, with dark eyes, a full, silky beard, and a Romanesque nose. Marie had repeatedly declared to Maggie that he was her beau idéal of manly perfection and beauty, and she, simple, trusting soul, endorsed the report of his mental and spiritual worth, as freely as she did that of his physical charms, and believed devoutly in both.

He abandoned his station by the mantel at her wordless appeal, and pushing an ottoman towards her, sat down at her feet.

"Why would it be untrue?" he asked, insinuatingly. "You cannot be said to know a thing that you are not sure of. You had your suspicions that Thomas would be Thomas no longer, when he took off his new great coat, but what proof had you of my identity, besides this vague impression? I contend that you would commit a grave error were you to say anything of so slight a surmise, when you are questioned about our innocent frolic. There is no reason why you should get yourself into needless trouble."

"You see, my darling," resumed Marie, "Albert came unexpectedly in the six o'clock train. He wrote to me this morning, inclosing a note for you, saying that he would be up to-night, and asking me to have you here. But this did not arrive until an hour after he did. So, mamma having gone to spend the night in New York, and taken the boys with her, I

had no chaperone or escort to watch over me in my moonlight jaunt, unless I had chosen to keep the baby out of bed, and run the risk of croup, cough, and crossness. Thomas was out of the way too. He always is when I want him. What else could we do, unless we had broken our hearts by doing without you?"

"Perhaps she thinks that would have been the best arrangement," said Lorraine, artfully.

"You know better than that!" said Maggie, in ingenuous haste. "But, I think Marian would have let me come more readily if she had known who your protector was. I do not see what objection she would have had, for she believes that you two are —" she stopped, covered with blushes.

"Yes — of course!" nodded Marie. "She thinks just what we meant she should, until we are ready to undeceive her. Why call her attention to Albert's frequent companionship with yourself more than is necessary? And your god-father, my dear! that unselfish adopted brother of yours, what would he have said to your moonlight flitting?"

"Indeed, dear Marie, you are greatly mistaken as to Mr. Cleveland's feelings for me!" rejoined Maggie, eagerly. "He is a friend — a brotherly friend — nothing more, I do assure you!"

"*Nous verrons!* For the nonce, he is useful to us. Now, as I can guess how unwelcome I am here, I shall betake myself to the parlor to write a letter. See here, my pet!" She drew a foreign-looking missive from her pocket, and partially unfolded the large, thin sheets. "You are not the only happy ones to-night."

"O, delightful!" exclaimed Maggie, clapping her hands. "When did it come?"

"Albert brought it up, like the good brother he is."

"Is he well?"

“Very well in body; — *très malheureux et très fidèle, selon les règles!*” said Marie, without a blush, and evidently thinking that the foreign phrase was a very modest veil for communications upon so delicate a subject. And she danced out singing, “*Toujours fidèle! Toujours fidèle!*”

Uncomfortable as John Cleveland's reveries were after Maggie's abduction, they were cheerful in comparison with the horror that would have seized him, could he have looked into Miss Dupont's boudoir that night. Maggie's hand lay confidently in Lorraine's, while his arm encircled her waist; love words fell fast and low from his lips, and no utterance of hers reproved his freedom. Why should she shrink from, or repel her betrothed lover?

This was a romance of Marie's manufacture. Affianced herself to an elder Lorraine, who was now abroad, she desired that her “twin soul,” as she was fond of styling Maggie, should know similar felicity. Who more likely to effect this end than her Clement's brother? Albert was nothing loath when he had once seen his predestined innamorata. From thinking of the benefit to accrue to him from an alliance with the daughter of a wealthy man, he soon came to love the gentle, pretty creature thrown sedulously in his way; — a love far inferior in quality to the depth and singleness of Cleveland's devotion, but as exalted a sentiment as he was capable of feeling. The two men were opposites in grain and in culture. Beneath John's ready smile and merry word there were solidity of thought, uncorruptible principle, and true, inborn refinement, while Lorraine's volubility, a heritage from his French father, covered, sometimes well, sometimes miserably, a shallow, ill-worked mind, as did his gallant and fine sayings, inherent and ineradicable selfishness.

Maggie was hardly to blame that her womanly instinct erred in her estimate of her suitor. Marie's influence over her was

not merely the ascendancy of a strong over a pliant will ; it was the authority of a clever mistress over a loving slave. While Mr. Boylan delved in his counting-house, and his wife dozed, read novels, and bemoaned her petty griefs at home ; while Tiny held fidgety sway in her domain, and Marian ruled with a milder hand in hers, the youngling of the flock was helped by Marie's mother wit to cheat and evade teachers in class hours, and walked, ate, and slept with her during the rest of the twenty-four. She spent more holidays and Sabbaths at Mrs. Dupont's than in her own home, and no one vetoed the arrangement. Tiny's jealousy of her growth in stature and beauty made her presence at her father's irksome to both sisters, and while Marian regretted that this was so, she could not chide Maggie for preferring Marie's society. Albert Lorraine was always in attendance on these fête days, and nobody asked wherefore this should not be. Mrs. Dupont had her friends, and her daughter had hers, and they were best pleased when the house was full of a giddy crowd of pleasure-seekers, whose chief object in existence was the enjoyment of the passing hour.

It was impossible that an impressible girl should retain, in this atmosphere, that rectitude of intention with respect to the right and the wrong, that nicety of discrimination between the true and the false, which is requisite to guide her safely through the labyrinths of fashionable life. Marie's pupil charmed her instructress by her proficiency in dissimulation after her acquaintance with Lorraine had arrived at a certain stage, the interesting turning-point between mutual and evident admiration, and a more absorbing, but more shy emotion. "Maggie never could hide anything in her life," was a proverb in her home, and the faith of her family in its truth was never stronger than when she wore what was supposed to be a present from Marie, but was, in reality, the publicly displayed pledge of a

secret betrothal. But why secret? Because Marie so willed it, and Marie knew best what was to be done for her in this, as in everything else, because Albert seconded Marie, and Albert was infallible, thought Maggie. Because it was so delightfully romantic, and had the enchanting smack of mystery that she relished; because it was grand fun to carry the matter on without being suspected by a soul beyond their little circle, and the dénouement would be splendid! thought Marie, gleefully. All women love the post of privy-counsellor and manager-general. With her, this liking was a passion. Because it was sound wisdom to secure the young bird before trying to ensnare the old one, and Mr. Boylan was a very sly old bird, one whose investigations and calculations were likely to be unpleasantly close. It was not every fellow whose everyday life could bear such an airing as must be undergone by any one who offered to become his son-in-law. The thing must be confessed at last, but where was the hurry? This was a much more agreeable fashion of love-making than a hum-drum courtship, prosecuted under the prying eyes and vixenish nose of that fussy old maid sister. And when it should "come out," what a sensation the news would create! how the girls would envy her, and the men hate him for having so cunningly stolen a march upon them!

Thus Lorraine had secretly reasoned hitherto, but there were certain grave reasons now why he should alter his policy. Fast horses, champagne suppers, and cards, the luxuries enumerated by Mr. Carvell, as those to which the gay youth did most seriously incline, could not be kept up on *only* a "fair salary," and creditors began to encroach upon his pleasures. The *prestige* of an engagement with the daughter of a rich merchant would keep these troublesome creatures at bay until he could "raise the wind." It was an agreeable way to get out of his difficulties, this marrying the girl he worshipped. This was not exactly the way he stated his case to Maggie, however.

"You see, my angel, I am growing very impatient, not so much of concealment, but of the necessity for it. I cannot live without you much longer. You are now nineteen years old. Mrs. Ainslie was but twenty when she married. Why should I not ask your father to make me as happy as he did your brother-in-law? a thousand times more happy, indeed, for what is Marian compared with my precious girl? I am miserable without you. I only live in your presence. Why may I not enjoy it always?"

Maggie hid her face upon the arm of the sofa.

"No, no!" she murmured, while a shiver ran over her, born of what strange presentiment, of what inward recoil, she could not tell.

Lorraine frowned — a look it was as well she did not see.

"No! and why not?" he asked, in a soft voice, that had no kinship with the language of his eye. "You fear lest you would weary of me, then, if I were continually near you?"

Her reply was to place her hand within his.

"Perhaps, then, you dread a refusal from your father? I acknowledge that I do not deserve you, Maggie. No man living ever can."

"You are too good for me!" returned she, half audibly.

"Your father may differ from you as to this. How then?"

"He will like you. How could it be otherwise?" Maggie raised her head to say earnestly. "He is irritable and often stern. I am afraid of him, but you need never be. I have heard Marian say that he was very kind and just to Will when he proposed for her."

"Kind and just! That means came down pretty handsomely with the rhino, I hope!" thought Lorraine. "What is your objection, then?" he inquired, yet more tenderly.

Again Maggie shook with that unaccountable, nameless fear, and her eyes dilated as at the approach of some startling apparition.

"I don't know; I am nervous, I suppose. We are so happy now that I dread any change!" she faltered.

Lorraine arose loftily. "Which dread I am to construe into a disinclination ever to become my wife!" he said, freezingly; then, turning from her, apparently to conceal his emotion, he added in a changed tone: "And this is the end of all my hopes! I had not looked for coquetry from you, Maggie!"

"The end!" Maggie seized his hand. "Oh, Albert! how can you misunderstand me so cruelly? Can you suspect me of trifling? *Me!*"

She sobbed as though her heart were broken.

Lorraine had gained the day. He felt this, as he took the frightened, weeping child into his arms, and soothed her with renewed protestations of love and trust. Marie perceived it upon her return to the apartment, and, well pleased at her ally's victory, informed him, gayly, that it was past midnight, and that Maggie's roses must be saved for the approaching ball.

When the girls were in their chamber, Miss Dupont listened to the story of the arrangements that awaited her sanction. Lorraine was to call upon Mr. Boylan the day succeeding the party, and formally request his permission to address his daughter.

"I begged him not to do it before that time," said Maggie. "It would be embarrassing to appear in company immediately after the announcement. People will be talking about us, you know, and then, to speak frankly, Marie, I think Tiny will be vexed when she hears it, and that would spoil the pleasure of my evening and hers too."

"A very good idea! Just as it should be!" responded Marie. "And, for pity's sake, don't have a long engagement. They are forlorn affairs when they are public. How much attention would I receive in society if it were believed that I was *fiancée*? When poor, dear Clement addressed me, I stip-

ulated that the affair should be kept a profound secret until his return. As to the blind which Albert's attentions throw over the state of my affections, it is so flimsy as scarcely to discourage the most faint-hearted of my other beaux. Any one who is at all knowing in *les affaires du cœur* must see that it is only a Platonic attachment on both sides. And your trousseau, my dearest! What fun we shall have in preparing it! Don't trust Tiny to superintend your shopping. Let Marian or myself do it. We will take more interest in making you charming. Albert has exquisite taste, and his bride must not disappoint him."

Maggie had ceased the duties of her toilet, and sunk down into a chair, her unbound hair streaming over her white dressing-gown, her eyes fixed on the fire. The brightness had all gone from her face, and a haggard expression had followed upon the spent excitement. She looked worn-out, anxious, unhappy — a sad sight in one who had just decided upon so important a move in life.

While Marie talked on of milliners, merchants, and mantua-makers, the thoughts of the other were roving far wide of such dissertations. Why should the scene she had quitted hours before, for the society of her lover, arise before her now in such distinctness and beauty? What meant the indefinable longing with which she turned to it — calm, restful, full of holy affection — after the hot, passionate atmosphere that had surrounded her since she had parted from the pleasant family group? What was the dull aching, far down in her heart, as she thought of saying "Farewell" to John, the steadfast friend of her girlhood? She had divined something of his prejudice against Lorraine; she knew that Albert returned the feeling with interest, that his wife would not be likely to meet his supposed rival, except as a common acquaintance. Why was it so hard to reconcile herself to the thought of this separation? She

could not endure to picture John's approach to her without the lighted eye, the beaming smile, the outstretched hand, and the deep, sweet voice, that made his simple "Maggie!" a more heartfelt greeting, a more earnest assurance of his interest in her than the most lavish professions from other tongues.

And Marian! Maggie had never realized before her belief in Marie's representations of Mrs. Ainslie's designs for her best-loved sister. She had repelled, laughingly or seriously, as the occasion required, Miss Dupont's intimations of Mr. Cleveland's sentiments with regard to his whilom playfellow, and the favor that these met with in the eyes of his partner's wife.

"Marian likes him, just as I do. She never dreams of bringing about a match between us. She would be very angry if she knew that such motives were imputed to her," she had said so often and so earnestly as to delude herself into the conviction of her own sincerity. She said it inwardly, now, but very faintly, and derived no comfort from the reflection. What if Will and Marian were alienated by the disclosure of her attachment to Albert? Would she have to resign them also? And Tiny would be mortally offended at her presumption in daring to be engaged before herself, and her mother would cry all day.

"Heigho!"

"What a sigh! and what a distressed countenance!" cried Marie, with a shriek of laughter that made Maggie jump as if a pistol had been fired at her ear. "One would think that the child were going to be buried, instead of married!"

Maggie burst into a flood of hysterical tears.

"I wish I were! O, Marie! I am afraid! I am afraid!"

CHAPTER VI.

"I HAVE brought John back with me," said Mr. Ainslie to his wife, the next evening.

Marian was preparing a salad in the dining-room, whither her husband had come to seek her.

"I am glad to hear it!" she said, sincerely. "He is always welcome — never makes any difference in my arrangements. How did you prevail upon him to deviate so far from his fixed principles as to visit us upon two successive days?"

"Why, the truth is, the poor fellow has been unusually depressed to-day. He tried not to show it, pretended he had a headache from drinking that punch last night, that would not have hurt a fly, but I saw through it all. I told him the quiet and purer air of the country would cure him, and in spite of a desperate show of resistance on his part, I brought him along. I tell you what, Marian, he is pretty far gone! Can't I recognize the signs?"

Mr. Ainslie emphasized these observations by a kiss, bestowed with unwonted gusto, born of the awakened memories of the days when the familiar symptoms possessed him also. Marian smiled wisely, and went on with her work, Will standing by and watching the interesting process.

"Will Maggie drop in this evening, do you think?" he inquired.

"I hope so, unless the saucy minx is afraid to face me after the escapade of last night."

"Better not scold her!" advised Will. "She is a timid, tender-hearted little thing, and loves you very dearly. I don't believe she ever had a thought she was not willing you should share."

"Maggie is affectionate and frank; there is no doubt about that," said Marian. "She would be safer in the world if she had more force of character, and the power, if not the disposition, to hide her feelings, but she is a sweet child, and I have no wish to scold her. She gets enough of that at home."

"The more reason why she should marry John! (Don't you think a trifle more oil would be an improvement?) His wife will never have cause to complain of his harshness or stubbornness. (Not too much Cayenne, lovey! John has a tender mouth.)"

"Did that last observation refer to his eating my salad, or his obedience to the wifely curb?" asked Marian.

"To both, if you choose. He dreads pepper and temper alike. That is why Tiny never caught him. That reminds me!—did I ever tell you that when he comes home with me, we always take the back street, to avoid her look-out from the parlor windows? She scrutinizes every man that passes that way from the depot. If there is anything that makes me nervous, it is to have her pop in while he is here."

"Am I not a troublesome visitor?" said John, as his hostess extended her hand in welcome.

"Only when you apologize for giving us pleasure," she answered, frankly as gracefully.

She had that rare virtue in a wife, of viewing her husband's friends as her own. In consideration of this, and a hundred other excellent traits, John was willing to overlook her satirical tendencies and very decided fondness for assuming the rule wherever she had a semblance of right to do so. She made Will very happy, and his home more than comfortable for him

and his associates, and she was the sister preferred by Maggie, therefore John loved her almost as well as if she were his sister also.

The new dressing-gown and cap had not been sent to the city yet, and the three adjourned to the smoking-room after dinner, for a repetition of the previous night's performances. All thought of the figure that was missing from the corner ottoman, but no one spoke of her, unless a sigh that escaped John's lips, with the first whiff of smoke, were an unsyllabled lament over departed joys. It was hardly lost in air, when a rosy face peeped in at the door.

"Is there admittance for a runaway, Marian, dear? I have come for my lecture."

"Come in!" called Will. "I will stand between you and her, if she is inclined to be cross."

She advanced quite into the room before she perceived Mr. Cleveland. Then the blood poured over her cheeks and brow, and she paused as if meditating a retreat.

"I did not know that you were here!"

Marian exchanged a swift, triumphant glance with her husband.

"Why should he not be where you left him?" she said. "We have only to imagine that Miss Dupont's call and kidnapping exploit were an unpleasant dream, and we shall be as merry as we meant to be last evening."

Maggie changed color. She was busied in untying her hood and taking off her shawl, but John thought he detected a twinge of painful emotion about the mouth. She was silent for a minute, until her wrappings were unfolded and laid on a table, at the back of the room. Was there a fleeting wish, clear as transient, that all that had passed last night, after she left them, were indeed a dream? She did not ponder this question. She was playing a part, and her rôle must not be marred by dangerous meditations.

Instead of accepting the chair offered by her brother-in-law, she sat down upon Marian's foot-cushion, and crossed her arms upon her sister's lap in mock penitence.

"If you please, madam, I am sorry I was naughty last night!"

"Not very naughty!" Marian caressed the pretty head resting against her knee. "It was not your fault, and we were more disappointed than angry. Only, dear" — she felt that she must warn the inexperienced child — "I do not admire Miss Dupont so much as I could wish, since she is so dear to you. She is too loud and self-willed to suit my taste; too much her own mistress, and disposed to domineer over others for so young a lady."

Maggie was troubled. "Marie means well, sister. It is only her way. She is very kind and good, and I can't help loving her."

"Love her as much as you choose," interposed Will. "But don't grow to be like her."

"Preposterous!" ejaculated John, flippant his cigar, impatiently. "As if she ever could!"

Maggie tried to smile. "You mean to be complimentary, I suppose, Mr. Cleveland, and I thank you for your good opinion of me, but in my eyes, Marie is almost perfection, and I regret more than I can express, the dislike that you have all conceived for her."

"True to your colors! That's a brave girl! Stand up for your friends, right or wrong!" said Will, in his character as Maggie's backer.

"But our best friends have faults," responded Marian, "and you must confess, dear Maggie, that it was neither friendly nor ladylike in Miss Dupont to play such a trick upon you as dressing her lover in her coachman's livery, and enticing you to accompany her, and me to permit you to go, by representa-

tions of 'Thomas' respectability! Whatever liberty she may choose to take with you, her terms of intimacy with Mr. Ainslie and myself do not justify her in attempting practical jests with us."

"Keep cool!" suggested Will. "Fair and easy! Don't crowd on steam upon a down grade!"

"I don't mean to be harsh or uncharitable, darling!" Marian, warm-tempered, but warm-hearted, checked herself and went on more mildly. "You know that I would not vex you wilfully, nor do I hold you accountable for your companions' imprudence or folly. After all, as John intimates, there is no danger of their doing *you* any harm."

Now John never intended to imply any such thing. That Maggie could grow into a counterpart of Miss Dupont, he did not believe; that she might sustain much and serious injury by her intercourse with this wild girl, he greatly feared. But this was not the time for him to speak. He saw that Maggie was already wounded to the quick. The grieved, not sulky pout of her red lip, her downcast eyes and varying complexion, were a pretty and touching sight. *He* could not have put the next question that fell from Marian, although his anxiety to hear the reply exceeded hers.

"Did you know that Mr. Lorraine was Miss Dupont's driver before you got into the carriage?"

Maggie hesitated. It was not an easy thing for her to equivocate, much less tell a direct untruth, when removed from Marie's eye and guidance. She had expected this query, and as we have seen, been prepared for it by her Jesuitical instructors; but still her tongue was slow to frame the words her mind had ready. Involuntarily she glanced at John. His eyes were fastened upon her: his countenance eager, expectant, apprehensive. With womanly quickness she recalled the searching look he had shot at the supposed coachman, at the

sound of the voice that had drawn her attention to him, and considered the probability that her agitation had not passed unnoticed.

She spoke very slowly, trying to master the confusion that was beginning to becloud her wits. "I had no suspicion of anything wrong until I heard him speak. Then I was surprised, for I know Thomas' voice well, and thought that this was not he. After we started, Marie told me how she had hoaxed us. I was sadly troubled, for I foresaw how displeased you all would be. She apologized, upon seeing how badly I felt, and begged me to assure you, if you were offended, that she only intended a harmless jest."

"Tried by a council of peers, and honorably acquitted!" said Will.

"One more question!" resumed Marian, somewhat curiously. "What did Mr. Lorraine, the usurper of honest Thomas' dignities and overcoat, say about his part in this refined species of amusement?"

"All that a gentleman could do!" answered Maggie, with unwonted spirit. Her eyes sparkled, her cheek burned, and she arose to her feet. "Is my cross-examination ended?"

"There, there! Marian; you are making a mountain out of a mole-hill, as I told you last night!" Will interfered. "Let the matter rest. It is all right, Maggie! So long as the man don't break your neck, we have no cause of complaint against him."

"I have no further inquiries to make," said Marian, drily. "It is a consolation to hear, since Maggie is obliged to associate with him, that Mr. Lorraine is a gentleman. I confess that I had misgivings upon the subject. He has, to me, more the air of a *chevalier d'industrie*."

It was very seldom that Mrs. Ainslie assumed this tone in addressing Maggie, and John was indignant that she did so now,

while he silently assented to her judgment of the "gentleman" under debate. His displeasure was quickly forgotten in admiration of the manner of the younger sister beneath the sarcasm. For one second, she quivered — literally swayed and shook, like a leaf in a storm — her head dropped, and her hands sought each other, in a tight, straining clasp. Then, she raised her face and forced a smile, while the tears gathered large and bright, ready to fall.

"Marian!" said her husband, in surprise. "You forgot that you are addressing this innocent child! She does not mean anything unkind to you, Maggie."

"I know it. She would not hurt my feelings any sooner than I would hers," she replied, sweetly, brushing off the clinging drops from her lashes. "We have never quarrelled yet, and we will not begin now, May, dear, will we? I was cross myself, or she would not have answered me as she did. Forgive and forget!"

She stooped over and kissed her sister's willing lips, and peace was restored outwardly at least.

"She is an angel!" thought Cleveland, enthusiastically. "There is not another like her in the universe!"

Truly Maggie had exercised what was in her an almost miraculous degree of self-control and magnanimity, in seeming to overlook and pardon this hasty and injudicious remark. We say "seeming," since her studiously-acquired art of dissimulation had some part in her conduct. To refute the aspersion cast upon Albert's character, would have been to avow intimate acquaintance with his antecedents and habits of life; to resent it, might reveal a keener smart than she had a right to feel from this thrust at a friend's friend. To propitiate Marian was indispensable, whether her engagement remained secret, or was soon avowed. Marie's parting advice was, that this coadjutor should be secured at all hazards. Therefore,

far as the repentant sister was from imagining it, there was hypocrisy in the kiss of reconciliation she received, burning, bitter thoughts hidden behind the blushing, tearful face that bowed over her, as the token of amity was exchanged.

"Not another like her in creation!" repeated John, inwardly. "How far superior to both of her sisters!"

The front door was opened and closed, and a pair of high heels clicked along the hall-floor—a patter, not unlike the scamper of a cat shod with walnut shells. Will arose aghast; Marian sighed, not inaudibly. John threw his cigar into the grate and gave a wistful, hopeless look at a bay-window, as if seeking a hiding-place.

"Not a word to Tiny about this—please!" Maggie had just time to say, in a terrified, imploring tone, when the diminutive Terror appeared.

"Ah! I have found you, have I, truant?" she began, affectionately jocular, appearing to see Maggie only.

"Yes, madam, here I am quite at your service!" said Mr. Cleveland, audaciously impertinent, making a low bow.

Tiny uttered a charming little scream, and put both hands to her face in dire confusion.

"Mercy! Mr. Cleveland, you have frightened me nearly to death! Who would have thought of seeing you here?"

"I cannot say, indeed, unless you did!" rejoined he, wickedly, and Tiny little thought how sincerely.

"Not I! I came to hunt up this naughty child, who ran off without giving me a hint of her intentions, and left me with no company besides my own meditations."

"And that they were not agreeable, we are to judge from your appearance here," John went on, more from the force of habit and the feeling that he must be talking, than from any propensity to badinage. "We are debtors to those same annoying reflections. Your pain has been our gain."

Tiny tossed her head gratifiedly, and put up one nicely-fitting gaiter on the fender, to warm or to show the foot it covered. She was especially vain of her hands and feet, and was forever devising ways and means of exhibiting them. Maggie had retired into the back-ground, and sat demurely thinking her own thoughts.

"Why does Mr. Cleveland flatter Tiny? He never runs on in that strain to me," she had once said to Marian.

"No; because he respects you, and nobody that knows her can respect Tiny," was the reply.

It came back to Maggie now, and brought with it a sense of shame and humiliation.

"Would he, could he respect me if he knew all?" she asked herself. "Oh, if it were over, and I could see what was before me!"

"I ran over to consult you, Marian," Tiny continued, with a plausible show of probability "about my preparations about Marie Dupont's party. "Are you going?"

"No."

"No? who is to chaperone us if you decline the office?"

"I cannot say, I am sure, unless Ma will undertake the task."

"That would be a resurrection indeed! Poor, dear mamma would expire at the thought of so much exertion. Why do you stay away? You are so fond of going out, and this is to be the most brilliant affair of the season, I understand. Marie is Maggie's best friend, too! She will think it odd if you are not there."

Tiny said all this in the smoothest of coaxing tones, a sort of affected purr, that acted uncomfortably upon the mental diaphragms of those who were familiar with her out-of-company moods.

"I suppose, moreover, that it will not be many months

before Miss Dupont retires to the seclusion of wedded life," she continued, bent upon being entertaining. "Mr. Lorraine is the soul of devotion. What a handsome couple they will be! I presume there is no doubt about their being engaged. How is it, Maggie?"

Maggie gave a start as from a profound reverie.

"What did you say?" she stammered, entirely at a loss how to reply.

"Why, you are dreaming, surely! I asked you if Marie Dupont were engaged to Mr. Lorraine."

The answer was withheld until all eyes were turned wonderingly upon the confused girl. Her presence of mind had completely forsaken her. She had been sorely tried by the conversation that preceded Tiny's entrance, and ere her cheeks had cooled, or her heart ceased its alarmed tremor, this direct question put her returning composure to flight. Without a thought of the after consequences of such a response — only dreading lest her trepidation might provoke further investigation and lead to premature discovery — she said, hastily, but with tolerable firmness, "Yes, — that is, I believe that she is."

"I did not say to *Albert Lorraine*!" she excused herself in her own mind, at the exclamation of conscience against this falsehood. It was a quibble worthy of Marie's scholar, and a part of its punishment was not slow. "In three days they will all know that you have told a deliberate untruth!" said Conscience, sternly. "Will this miserable plea clear you in their eyes?"

John saw her growing distress, and attributed it to a different cause.

"It is unfair to put you to so severe a test of your discretion," he said, gayly. "These pretty little stories are usually committed to the keeping of some fifty intimate friends, each

of whom is sworn to secrecy until the moment of general disclosure arrives. Like the plot of a novel, the secret, technically so-called, may be guessed by the shrewd reader of the opening chapter, but he is expected to keep his suspicions to himself, and be properly thrilled when the *dénouement* is announced. Is it not so with Love's mysteries, Miss Tiny?"

Maggie was grateful for the diversion of notice from herself; Tiny tickled by the very frail straw of his appeal to her upon this interesting subject. Such straws, she wisely argued, showed which way the wind blew, and to the faintest zephyr from the Enchanted Land where Hymen reigned, the vane of her imagination turned alluringly.

The hour that followed was filled up with cheerful chat, all joining in with a show of mirth, Mr. Cleveland leading in genuine lightness of heart. Still, intermingled with his glee, there was a kindliness of tone, a softened gleam in his eye, that bespoke the rule of some deeper, gentler emotion than that called forth by the hilarious converse in which he was a participant. Tiny manœuvred carefully, but vainly, to make him wait upon her home. He put her shawl upon her shoulders as she requested; picked up the gloves, then the rigolette she let fall at his feet, and while she was drawing on the former, he stepped across to where Maggie stood, close beside Mr. Ainslie, and invited her to take his arm.

Will had a thankless duty to perform in escorting his fair, elder sister to the paternal abode. Her heels clattered upon the sidewalk with a decided ring that betrayed the spiteful, slighted woman; her head oscillated like that of a fretful colt under a curb, and after the tart monosyllable that noticed his observation upon the beauty of the night, neither spoke until they were at the gate of Mr. Boylan's garden.

"What a lazy walker Maggie is!" snapped Tiny then, sending a jealous gleam of her gray eyes down the street to where

the flood of moonlight showed two forms slowly approaching the goal she had reached:

"I am much mistaken if Cleveland is not the laggard," returned Will, taking out a match and a cigar.

"He can walk fast enough when he likes," said Tiny crossly. "You were both in such haste this afternoon, that you had not the politeness to stay and help me out of the cars."

"I did not know that you were on the train. Had you been down to the city?"

"Yes, and was tired to death! I called you as loud as I could. I wanted your arm up the hill."

"I did not hear you. It was a pity!"

"Oh, I could not expect you to have eyes or ears for *me*! If it had been Maggie, neither of you would have been so blind or deaf."

Will lighted his cigar in prudent silence, cogitating upon this one signal failure of his back street stratagem, and amused at the idea of what Tiny's sensations would be when she called to mind the discrepancy between the statement she had just made and her extravagant display of surprise at finding Mr. Cleveland in her sister's library.

"A nut for Marian to crack!" he thought, and then resolved upon the self-denial of keeping it from her. "The fact is, those girls quarrel too much now. Tiny is a vixen, but worrying does not improve her temper."

All this time John and his companion were walking slowly homewards in the bright moonlight. Not many words had passed between them, but these few were full of meaning.

"Have I said anything to wound you to-night?" John inquired, when they were fairly in the street.

"No, nothing!"

Then came a pause.

"I wish I could tell you, Maggie, how fervently I desire

your happiness — how precious in my sight is your peace of mind, present and future.”

“Thank you! You are a true friend.”

“I am not!” exclaimed John, impetuously. “It is a cold word! I may be presumptuous; but I am no longer satisfied with the name and place of ‘friend.’ For years I have longed for the hour when I could throw off this disguise, and confess to you the stronger, warmer feeling that fills my heart.”

“Please don’t!” Maggie’s hand fell from his arm, and she drew back in alarm. “Don’t speak to me in that way! I mean, don’t say anything more until — I am not prepared to answer — wait awhile and I will” — her voice died away.

“Wait!” repeated John, joyfully. “As long as you bid me, dear Maggie! I love you too truly to disturb you by wringing a reply from you in your surprise and agitation at my unexpected avowal. I only ask that you will think upon what I have said, and, some time, when you can listen more quietly, allow me to speak to you again upon this subject. My affection is not the hasty growth of a day, that it cannot endure a brief period of suspense. You will hear me at another time, will you not?”

Maggie’s heart beat so violently that she could not articulate. She bowed her head, too sick and dizzy to know what the gesture implied. John returned her hand to its resting-place, and felt a thrill of rapture, as she clung unconsciously to him. She needed the support, and with it, tottered rather than walked by his side, until they joined the impatient Tiny and her philosophically cool brother-in-law. This coolness enabled him to detect something unusual in the manner of the belated pedestrians, and he hurried the leavetakings so officiously that John could only press Maggie’s fingers as he released them, without a spoken word, and bow to Tiny, before he was dragged away.

“Well, I must say” — began Tiny, as she shut and locked the door after her.

If the strong necessity of speech was upon her, it is likely that she obeyed the promptings and had her “say” out. But it was in soliloquy, not merely unheard, but uncared for by Maggie. With a fleet but unsteady step she glided up the staircase, reached her room, made fast the entrance, and threw herself, face downwards, upon the bed — a frightened, helpless child, whose unthinking touch had set in motion machinery, the rush and whirl of which bore down her puny will, and threatened to destroy reason and happiness.

“I cannot be false to Albert! Yet John thinks that I have encouraged him. I dare not undeceive him! It is wicked and cruel to let him go on loving me! Oh, how I wish that I could tell him everything, and ask him to forgive me! I used to think it would be a delightful thing to be loved. I find now that it is more sad than sweet!”

Thus she mused, thinking and weeping, marvelling at and lamenting the grievous perplexities that had crept into the life, lately so bright and free, until, chilled and exhausted, she got up and began to prepare for slumber. Her diamond ring flashed glaringly, pertinaciously, as her hand moved to and fro in the gaslight. While combing out her long, soft hair, she was constrained, as it were, by its reflected gleams in the mirror, to pause and examine it more closely.

No, she was *not* free to think of another’s love! Here was the symbol of her bondage. Its dazzling rays seemed to mock her indecision. Not that she was really halting between two opinions. She knew her duty, and was ready to obey its leadings. Albert was handsome and noble, and he idolized her. Marie was always telling her what a prize she had won, and how many other girls had tried to capture him and failed; and how proud and happy she ought to be — and whatever Marie

approved must be right. It would be very pleasant to be her sister, and live next door to her, and go out riding, and shopping, and visiting with her, and hear everybody talking in praise of the two Mesdames Lorraine; but there was so much to be braved, so many explanations to make! Her thoughts were running into the same channel they had taken, the previous evening, while Marie was descanting upon these future glories, and somehow she could not drive them back now. Marie had said that she was cowardly and childish in permitting these fears to overshadow her, and that she ought to love Albert so intensely as to lose sight of everything and everybody else in the world. "I do love him! I could not have engaged myself to him if I had not loved him *passionately*!" she murmured, in self-exculpation; but the contrast between the strength of meaning in the word and the feeble emphasis was nearly ludicrous.

At that instant, just as she was raising the ring to her lips — the caress Lorraine had begged her to bestow each night and morning upon his love-token — she heard the distant shriek of a locomotive. It was the train in which John was to go back to the city. She imagined him happy and hopeful, forgetting the loneliness of his ride in dreams of her and the sweet half-promise he had obtained. She remembered the respectful fervor of his address — the very simplicity of earnestness; his delicate allusion to his long attachment; the generosity he had showed in consenting to await her time of reply — and unconsciously at first, afterwards in spite of her will, she compared all this with the fluent, high-flown, pressing declaration of her accepted lover.

"But it is no use thinking of these things now!" she said, aloud and desperately. "The matter is settled, and all I can do is to float with the current. Only" — her voice breaking and eyes swimming — "I should be happier if I could love

Albert as well when I am away from him as when he is with me !”

And for the first time since it was put upon her finger she fell asleep without kissing the charmed ring.

CHAPTER VII.

ONE of the minor indulgences which Mr. Boylan allowed himself, in consideration of his advancing age, was a later breakfast, and consequently, a later appearance at his place of business than he had esteemed proper and necessary in former years. The morning succeeding Miss Dupont's party, he was in no haste to be off. He was not, at heart, an unkind, although often outwardly a harsh parent, and when in a good humor, he liked to hear the girls talk over their frolics.

Tiny was in high feather all breakfast-time. Mr. Cleveland had come out of town early in the evening to escort her — she made no mention of Maggie — to the festive scene. He had danced twice with her, and introduced her to a succession of delightful partners. These items leaked out, of their own weight, through her descriptions of dresses, supper, people, etc., which etcetera comprised an elaborate account of Mrs. Dupont's flattering hospitality, and Marie's attention to herself, the eminently deserving Miss Boylan. Tiny was egregiously vain, as both her father and Maggie well knew; but the one was too much amused by her flippant gossip, and the other too abstracted to check her egotistical prating. She had, thus left to herself, gained such headway, that when Marian walked into the breakfast-room and informed the party at the table that she was there on purpose to hear news of the ball, Tiny remained spokeswoman. She flirted her head defiantly, as if prepared to retort with double force, upon whatever of innu-

endo and raillery Marian might feel herself called upon to enunciate, and held on her course.

"The Dashaways were there in great strength. They never miss an invitation. There is such a brood of them that some must leave the nest soon, or they will have to shed their fine feathers. Mr. Lorraine said they appeared in the character of a rainbow, mistaking it for a fancy dress ball. Sophie was in yellow, Emma in pale pink, Julia in blue, and little Pauline in white."

"Only two of the original prismatic colors in the party!" said Marian. "Why do you pity them? They outnumber us by one only."

"One in a family makes a great difference, when that one is a fourth daughter, to be settled in the world," rejoined Tiny. "Particularly, as it seems to be uphill work with them all to get husbands."

"Ah! that alters their case. Any woman in such a position has my commiseration. I see now that they have every reason to envy *our* family. But go on! You had a fair representation of foreigners — 'Jews, Turks, and Infidels,' I suppose?"

"By no means! The company was as select as so large an assemblage could be. Mrs. Dupont mingles in the best American circles. Why should she not? She is not French, if her husband was."

"A sharp fellow!" said Mr. Boylan. "A keen business man, and he bore a good character."

"Then there were the Vanderbiggs, and the Van Phlats, overdressed, blouzy, and stupid, in everybody's way, mute as fish, and loaded with jewelry. Mr. Lorraine whispered to me that an amicable arrangement had been entered into by Mrs. Dupont, and Ball, and Black, whereby they — Ball and Black — were allowed to furnish several walking advertisements of

their wares, for her parlors, and that this was their great show evening. I nearly died with laughing at the notion."

"A witticism that has the merit of originality, certainly," said Mrs. Ainslie. "I do not recollect to have heard it above a hundred times. No wonder it came near being fatal to you!"

Tiny dashed on. "But the richest sight of all was the bride, Mrs. Uxor."

"Ha! I heard the old man had made a goose of himself for the third time," commented Mr. Boylan, helping himself to a hot muffin. "He is rich enough to afford it, however. If he has a fancy to take another dip in purgatory, nobody need hinder him. Who was she?"

"A poor schoolma'am, whom he picked up last summer, among the White Mountains, with nothing but health and flesh to recommend her. She stared about her, as if she were at a cattle fair. I told Mr. Cleveland that the tale of her birth-place must be a mistake. It was plain that she was raised in the *Green Mountains*, instead. He! he!"

"Whereupon *he* nearly killed himself laughing, of course!" said Marian. "Poor John! But I have not heard yet how this silent girl acquitted herself," she added, changing her manner as she turned to Maggie. "Did you have a merry and a successful evening, Puss?"

"A merry and a pleasant one. I say nothing of its success," returned Maggie, smiling.

"That we will take for granted. Who were your most irresistible and attentive partners?"

Maggie named some half-dozen gentlemen, as having been very polite and agreeable.

"You do not mention our friend, Mr. Cleveland," said Mrs. Ainslie, secretly pleased at an omission which might proceed from maiden bashfulness. "Did Tiny monopolize him to the exclusion of every other lady?"

"There was no monopoly in the matter!" put in Tiny. "The attentions he rendered me were voluntary. Thank gracious! I am not dependent upon the pleasure of any one man when I go into company. Mr. Cleveland waited upon Maggie quite as much as was consistent with his duties to others."

"I was not aware that he owed duty to any one besides her. If you are right, however, this may explain some things that have perplexed me heretofore. I refer to his polite notice of those persons to whom inclination certainly could not be supposed to direct him. He is an unselfish fellow."

"A fine young man!" said Mr. Boylan, not at all discomposed by the spirited passages between his daughters. "If you can catch him, Tiny, you will do well. I give my consent in advance."

Tiny tried to blush and *not* to look too pleased. Marian laughed — a low laugh of sarcastic incredulity, that required no words to second its meaning.

"You were speaking of Mr. Lorraine, a while ago," she said. "Was he fascinating as usual, last night? as gay a butterfly as his chains would allow him to be?"

"He conducted himself admirably!" Tiny became his advocate, the instant Marian's tone seemed to decry him. "His relation to Marie authorized him to act as one of the family, and he played the part of host well. I can't see why you are eternally sneering at him. He is an elegant man, a thorough gentleman. I would set my cap at him, if he were not already pledged elsewhere."

"Hey?" exclaimed Mr. Boylan, suspending the operation of breaking a second egg. "That is the chap who waltzed so long with Miss Dupont at your party — isn't it?"

Tiny replied in the affirmative, somewhat startled by her father's manner.

"He is certainly engaged to be married to her, is he?"

"I believe there is no doubt of it, sir."

"She is a fool!" he rejoined, cracking the shell with his spoon, and speaking with deliberate energy. "A great fool to think of marrying that scoundrel. She will end her days in the poor-house, and he his upon the gallows, or at Sing-Sing."

"Why, Pa!" ejaculated the amazed Tiny, while Maggie shaded her eyes with her hand, and waited, with pale, averted face, for what terrible disclosure she could not guess. "You must be mistaken in the person."

"I mean what I say! His name is Lorraine, and he is a book-keeper with Lawrence & Co., — a tall fellow, with black hair and whiskers, wears a short moustache, dresses like a prince, or a dandy gambler, which he is. He is a great rascal. If I had not understood certainly that he was engaged to the French girl, I should have warned him off these premises, weeks ago. He is a wild, dissipated, trifling adventurer, whose character is not worth that" — snapping his fingers — "among substantial, clear-sighted men. I would horsewhip him if he ever presumed to pay his addresses to one of my daughters. So, Miss Tiny, let us hear no more jesting about setting your cap at him. I won't have his name coupled with that of either of you girls, even in fun."

The blood was slowly freezing around Maggie's heart. But for her intense desire to hear all, the worst that remained to be said, her senses would have deserted her.

"This is very strange!" said Mrs. Ainslie, deeply interested. "I cannot see how he managed to gain a foothold in good society."

"Through his brother, I hear," answered Mr. Boylan. "He is in business with Ward and Parrish, and possesses a handsome private fortune. He is a steady, enterprising man — older than this fellow, and is now travelling in Europe."

"Can it be possible that Marie is ignorant of her lover's true

character?" marvelled Marian. "I never liked him from the first, and I know that she is indiscreet, but I had no idea that matters were so bad as you say. She has a sad life before her if all this, or the half of it be true."

"It is true, I tell you! I have had it from the best authorities, and much more of the same nature that will not bear repeating. As for this girl, she must bear it as well as she can. It is all her own doing, and nobody else is to blame."

"I beg your pardon, sir! Her mother and friends *are* much to blame for suffering the engagement to be formed. Some one ought to warn her. She is no favorite of mine, yet I feel disposed to speak to her myself. It would be an act of common humanity!"

"You will do no such thing!" retorted Mr. Boylan, positively. "I don't choose that you shall mix yourself up in the affair, nor that you shall bring me into trouble. Let other people manage their own matters! you are not the regulator of public morals."

Marian was obstinate. "Then, sir, you will do all that does belong to your province—protect your daughters from the dangers of association with this person? They may repent it some day. It cannot be right in us to countenance persons of bad reputation."

Mr. Boylan laughed at the absurd suggestion.

"And go through the world demanding certificates of character from every man, woman and child whom you meet? We must take life as we find it, only looking out for number one, and let our neighbors do the same. If a young man visits here, I institute private inquiries as to his standing in business and in the social circle. If all is right, I let him alone. If he cannot stand the test, I manage to convey to him the knowledge that he is not welcome, unless I see that there is no risk in his occasional calls, as in this instance."

"It appears to me, nevertheless, papa, that every young, pure girl should shun the companionship of a wicked man, although he may be engaged, or even married to another," said Marian, steadily. "There is such a thing as unconscious contamination."

"Oh! if you are off upon the 'highfalutin' string, I have no more to say; I do not comprehend your overstrained theories," replied Mr. Boylan, rising. "I am a plain, practical man, who only knows enough to take care of himself and his household, without trying to turn the world upside down."

Maggie slipped out of the room during this speech, and sped up stairs. She could not seclude herself in her chamber, for Marian would soon seek her there, and to meet her sisterly eye, while she was in her present state, would inevitably betray everything. Up one, two, three flights of steps, she ran, fear lending strength to her feet, to a small room at the very top of the house, seldom visited by any member of the family, and where no one would dream of looking for her. She bolted the door, and then, as if still dreading detection, couched down behind a pile of boxes, shaking and panting like a hunted hare. She had cause for alarm. This was the day — this the forenoon, in which Lorraine was to call upon her father and communicate the tidings of their mutual attachment. She had heard, for herself, what answer he would receive. That it would be more favorable than her father had declared it should be, in his imaginary case, she could not believe. How could she endure the agony of shame — the just recompense of her deceit and imprudence, that hung over her? She was ruined for life! disgraced in the eyes of her family; the object of her father's wrath, her mother's grief, Marian's indignation, Tiny's sneers, John's silent contempt! Oh! if she could run away until the storm had passed; if she could hide, far, far from the gaze of any who had ever seen or known her; if she could die and be forgotten!

She did not weep; — her terror was too great. She grovelled on the floor, and wrung her hands, with inarticulate moans pressed out of her quaking heart by the load of anguished apprehension.

At last, a word escaped her writhing lips — “Marie!” repeated ever and again, like an invocation to a superior being. “If she were here, she would do something for me — would prevent this in some way.”

Piercing this blind trust in her friend, there darted a sudden thought. The telegraph! A message sent now might reach Lorraine before he had time to see her father. The idea brought her to her feet on the instant. Then arose a question. How should the dispatch be sent? What messenger could she trust? Clearly, no one except herself! She must contrive to elude Tiny’s cat-like espionage, and Marian’s affectionate watch, in leaving the house, and run the risk of encountering some inquisitive acquaintance in the telegraph office. For perhaps three minutes, she stood irresolute, then the image of her father’s angry face arose before her, and she hesitated no longer. Her room was vacant, but she heard her mother’s plaintive tones recapitulating some tale of woe to Marian in a neighboring apartment, and as she tied on her bonnet, she distinguished the click of Tiny’s heels in the passage on the private stairs leading to the kitchen. The coast was clear for a little while, then! She glided down the steps, passed the door and gate unchallenged, and gained the street leading into the town.

There happened to be no one in the office but the operator, who was a stranger to her, and gathering courage from her success thus far, Maggie sat down at a table and tried to compose her thoughts sufficiently to indite a message. It was no easy task to convey the warning she desired to send, in few, yet satisfactory words, without the introduction of proper names. She pencilled several notes, which were torn as soon as written,

being either too obscure or too explicit to be forwarded with safety. The operator sat, meanwhile, at his post, apparently unobservant of her, the incessant ticking of the mysterious machine aggravating her nervous disquiet. A man entered presently with a dispatch, and said that he would wait for the reply. Here was fresh trouble! What if there were other telegrams that were to precede hers, and thus delay it until the fatal interview had commenced!

Prompted by desperation, she wrote hurriedly — “Do not speak to my father until you have seen me. We are in danger. M. J. B.”

If the operator were curious, or unfaithful to his obligation of secrecy, he might surmise and expose everything from the single line she placed in his hand, but there was no alternative. Every downward step in deceit is necessarily an advance into danger. Poor, misguided Maggie was feeling, if she did not acknowledge this fixed law. She glanced at the clock as the man quietly laid aside the slip of paper to abide its time. Her father must be nearing the city at this hour.

“O, sir!” she entreated, “cannot you send it at once? It is very important.”

“There are two ahead of it,” was the cool rejoinder. “First come, first served!”

The ticking went on, but, as it seemed to Maggie’s agonized ears, more slowly than before.

“I am willing to pay any sum to have that message forwarded immediately,” she said, her voice shaking with the extremity of her solicitude.

It was a sweet, pleading accent, and the face turned towards the inflexible official was too girlish and pretty to be blanched by sorrow or anxiety. So thought the third person present, a ruddy-cheeked farmer, who lowered his newspaper, as the petition reached him.

"Let the lady's message go before mine;" he said kindly. "I can wait."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" exclaimed the grateful girl. "You are very good."

"You are welcome," he rejoined, and in his large, soft heart, he conjectured whether the dear child's father or mother were ill, or was it an absent brother she was longing to hear from?

Five minutes more by the grim dial-plate suspended against the wall, and the momentous message passed over the wires. Drawing a long breath, when she was assured that she had done all that she could, Maggie bowed silently to her stranger-friend and departed.

CHAPTER VIII.

TINY was not half through her morning tour of overseeing and fault-finding, the next day, when the Dupont carriage drove up to the door and Marie alighted. Her inquiry of the servant who answered her ring was not as usual, for "the young ladies," but very pointedly for "Miss Maggie." Yet it was Tiny who appeared in the parlor to welcome her.

"You will excuse my dishabille, I hope?" said Miss Boylan, glancing at her tidy wrapper.

"No apologies, I beg, my dear girl! I ought to ask your pardon for calling at such an unconscionably early hour, but, you know, Maggie and I cannot exist apart for two days, and I have a confidential matter I want to talk over with her this morning — something about my own personal affairs, and I had not patience to wait longer. (That hint may keep her meddling ladyship out of the room while I am with Maggie)," she added, inly.

"Certainly — I understand!" assented Tiny. "You may not have heard that the dear child has been sick ever since the night of your delightful party."

"I have not. What is the matter?"

"A feverish cold, with headache. She is not robust, blooming as she looks. I always distrust that peculiar varying flush in the cheek. It has a hectic appearance to me. I am pale; I never had color, even when a child, yet I am rarely sick."

"She can see me — can she not?" queried Marie.

"I will run up and see how she is, just now. Perhaps I can smuggle you in, although the doctor talks about nervous irritability, and enjoins quiet."

Maggie was alone, heavy-eyed and dejected. She turned crimson, then very white, as she heard who was below.

"Well," said Tiny, impatiently, "will you see her, or not?"

"Let her come up," answered Maggie, faintly.

"Then you take the responsibility, you understand, for if the doctor has anything to say about over-excitement, Marian will charge it all to me, and I am tired of bearing false accusations. I wash my hands of the whole transaction. And I *do* sincerely hope and trust, Maggie, that you will have the sense to hold your tongue about what Pa said yesterday at breakfast. If it is true, you can do no good by telling it to Marie. *She* is to marry the man, not you, and she is supposed to know her own business best. Mr. Lorraine is an agreeable gentleman, and Marie a most desirable acquaintance — just the stylish girl one likes to visit. As Pa says, it will not do for us to be more nice than wise, if we expect to make our way in life. You will be prudent — won't you?"

"Yes," murmured Maggie, turning her burning face to the pillow.

Tiny was bustling around the room, setting chairs straight, jerking at curtains, pulling and smoothing the bedclothes. "You must see for yourself how ridiculous it would be to tell Marie what kind of a man she will have for a husband. Even if he is dissipated, he may get over it. I have heard that these gay young fellows often make the best married men when they have sowed their wild oats. At any rate, it will be time enough to cut them when we see that they are going down in the world. For my part, I am apt to be charitable towards the failings of those I like."

She reappeared, by and by, conducting Marie, and saying,

playfully — “Remember, now; no exciting conversation!” left the friends together.

She had no sooner gone than Maggie threw herself upon her confidante’s bosom, and wept long and uncontrollably. Marie petted and pitied, and coaxed her back to a calmer mood.

“Now,” she said seriously and affectionately, when she had laid the tired girl upon her pillow, bathed her face with *eau de cologne* and brushed her hair, “tell me exactly what has happened to put you into such a state, and why you sent that dispatch to Albert.”

“He did get it, then, and in time!” exclaimed Maggie, clasping her hands.

“Yes, yes; but what possessed you to write it? He was half crazy about it last night. He was sure, he said, that something was wrong.”

“I am so glad — so relieved, to know that it reached him!” Maggie went on as if she had not heard the last clause of this remark. “I went to bed with a sick headache as soon as I got back from the office, and here I lay all day, dreading for Pa to come home. If Marian had not been with me, I should have fainted away when I heard him in the hall. I expected every minute that he would burst in upon me and order me out of the house. Then, he was talking with Ma in their room, and I was certain that it was about me, for I knew from her voice that she was crying, and I thought she was persuading him to let me stay until I got well. It is a great comfort to hear that they don’t know. It makes everything else so much easier for me. You have done me good already, Marie.”

“‘They don’t know’ *what*? ‘Everything else so much easier!’ You are talking in riddles! Do quiet yourself, and tell me what all this mystery is!” insisted Marie, in a fever of curiosity.

If Maggie had lent any heed to Tiny’s admonitions of silence,

she totally forgot or disregarded them now. She gave Marie a full account of her father's unflattering portrait of Miss Dupont's supposed betrothed; the predictions of ruin in store for him and for her, if she married him, dwelling longest upon the asseveration that he would horsewhip Lorraine if he ever presumed to lift his eyes to one of *his* daughters.

Marie listened attentively to the recital, and at its conclusion, sat still for some time, absorbed in reflection.

"I am sorry that this has happened for your sake, my darling," she said. "I had thought your father a man of more correct judgment than he has showed in condemning our dear Albert, upon mere hearsay, most probably upon the evidence of some jealous or prejudiced person. Albert has his enemies. What man of mark in society has not? To you, the noble fellow needs no vindication from these vile reports. His defence is written deep in your true, womanly heart, and this undeserved, this cruel persecution of so much excellence has but made him dearer to you, bound you to him by indissoluble ties. It is the common lot of those who love most fondly, dear Maggie, to have their mutual devotion baptized by tears, sealed, sanctified, made immortal by sorrow. I wish that it had been otherwise with you, for I would spare you every pang, yet the strength and purity of your love will sustain you through this tribulation. You will, in the end, be stronger, happier, and a more dearly loved wife because of this bitter trial."

"Wife!" echoed Maggie, bewildered by this breathless flow of sentimentalisms. "Did not I tell you that it was all off? that Pa would never give his consent? I could not marry without it, you know."

Some confidants would have been vexed at this ready submission to parental authority, and the evident failure of their exhortations to constancy towards the maligned one; many would have felt astonished at the preponderance of fear over

affection, in one who had confessed to such fervor of attachment. Marie was neither angered nor amazed. It is questionable whether she had relished any previous stage of this affair as heartily as she did this. On the topics of fathers' tyranny and the fidelity of ill-used lovers, she was perfectly at home, and she backed up her arguments by examples, *à propos*, and innumerable — from the standard authorities upon these points, to wit, French and Frenchy-English novels.

Maggie saw to what she was being drawn, but lay in a kind of mental paralysis, unable to struggle for liberty of will. Marie was a specious talker and an artful flatterer, and her soul was in her cause. Before her coming, Maggie was sad, but tranquil, and as she believed herself, free — Marie left her excited, miserable, and bound by a solemn promise to hold fast her troth, in defiance of parents, friends, evil reports, the world !

Miss Dupont came regularly every morning for a week, with presents of fruits and flowers, ostensibly from her mother's conservatory and hot-houses, and concealed beneath, or within each dainty offering, lay a tiny note, the serpent that lured the deluded girl still further from the path of right and honor. None of these appliances were superfluous. Each one was needed to keep Maggie true to her pledged word and false to filial duty. Never before had home been so delightful. Marian was her tender nurse during every afternoon and evening, and Will's pleasant face showed itself in her chamber each night, enlivening the patient with merry sayings and fresh anecdotes. Her father looked in upon her twice daily, to kiss her, inquire how she was, and if she wanted anything. Even her mother's inefficient anxiety touched Maggie, for she knew it to be sincere, and that she was her favorite child.

There were other floral visitors besides those introduced by Marie, — tasteful and emblematic groups, presented by Will

without a syllable of banter, and received by Maggie, with a strange, choking heart-ache. These were usually set out of sight before the time for Marie's visit arrived — why, Maggie scarcely asked herself. On the sixth day of her sickness, she inadvertently omitted this precaution. A bouquet, consisting of a white camellia, surrounded by heliotropes, 'stevias, and heather-sprigs, stood upon a stand beside the convalescent's chair, and attracted Marie's attention directly.

"Ah! here is something new!" she said, taking it up. "How pretty and fragrant! Who sent it, Mignonne?"

Maggie's cheeks were scarlet. "Mr. Cleveland."

"Constant as ever! Poor fellow!" smiled Marie, putting down the vase. "You are a clever little conspirator, my pet."

"A conspirator! I!"

"Yes, you! Do you mean to tell me that your acute brain — which is only stupid when it imagines itself to be silly — has not perceived what an invaluable assistant this faithful 'John' may be to us in maturing and concealing our plans?"

"I have never thought of him in that light. I have no plans, as you know, Marie. I am only waiting, by your advice, to see what time may do towards righting this sad, sad affair of mine," said Maggie, dejectedly.

But Marie shook her head, and looked her applause at the diplomacy that hid its end even from its co-workers.

"I don't see what use I can ever make of John's liking for me," persisted Maggie. "I only regret that it exists. It can bring nothing but pain to us both."

"He will never break his heart for any woman alive," returned Marie, carelessly. "He is too matter-of-fact in head, and too lively in disposition — too much of a lady's man. There is no passion about him, nothing grand and deep, as there is in Albert's character. I cannot fancy Mr. Cleveland's wife ever being awed by him"

"She would respect him!" said Maggie, in a low tone.

"Perhaps! *I* never could. I have no respect for the man who could love a woman for four years, and never take the trouble to let her know what his feelings were. It argues a want of heart or a looseness of principle," replied Marie, growing severely virtuous.

"But he has —" Maggie commenced, in eager vindication — then stopped and hid her face.

"*Voilà, qui devient intéressant!*" cried Marie, in her high, gay voice. "No half-way confidence with me, my beauty! I am dying to hear it all!"

That simple "all," Maggie was constrained to confess, feeling the while, very much as if she were guilty of sacrilege.

"Better and better!" said Marie, when assured that she had no more to hear. "He is in no haste for the answer to this impassioned proposal. Let him wait! Gentlemen of his temperament can be kept in suspense, *ad infinitum*, without injury to their appetites or digestions. You have only to quiet any feeble symptoms of impatience he may think proper to affect by the sugar-plum of a soft word or a bewitching glance, and there will be no difficulty in deferring your reply until the right moment of revelation arrives. Leave the management of all that to me! A better means of blinding your father and the Ainslies could not have been devised. Fortune smiles upon us, *Petite!*"

Mrs. Ainslie came over, as was her custom, about three o'clock that afternoon, and was electrified by Tiny's announcement — made with malicious glee — that her patient had flown. She had been carried off by Miss Dupont at noon.

"Whose plan was that?" inquired Marian, indignantly.

"Marie's invitation was warmly urged by all of Maggie's friends," Tiny said, dignifiedly. "I telegraphed for Pa's sanction, telling him that the doctor prescribed a change of place.

We did not think your consent necessary before concluding upon the arrangement. Maggie left a note for you."

Marian did not open it until she reached home. It was short, and penned unevenly — in weakness, haste, or agitation — probably all three.

"DEAREST MARIAN: Do not be vexed at my leaving you so suddenly. Marie is very urgent that I shall pass some days with her, and the doctor says that I need change of air and scene. Papa and mamma have given their consent, so you see I cannot help going. My only trouble is —" she had drawn a pen through these words and substituted — "The principal objection I have to accepting Marie's offer, is the fear lest you should disapprove of it. Dear sister, do not be angry with me! You know how dearly I love you, more than ever of late, for your goodness to me during my sickness. I am so unworthy of it all, but I do feel grateful! Kiss brother Will for me. Thank Mr. Cleveland for his kindness. I shall always remember it. I write with Marie and Tiny talking around me, as they pack my clothes, and my head is in a whirl. Again, forgive me, if I wound you by this abrupt departure. Marie is so determined that I cannot deny her anything. Lovingly,

"MAGGIE."

Marian shed tears of wounded feeling and pride over this epistle, as she showed it to her husband at night.

"That French girl's influence over Maggie is unaccountable. I, for one, will never try again to counteract it. I had hoped that Maggie appreciated my love and desire for her real good, but I see that it was all thrown away. It was unkind and ungrateful to you, as well as to myself. I will not go near her, or write a line to her, while she is with the Duponts."

"Gently! gently!" interposed Will.

“I say that I will not ! She does not need me. She withdrew herself from my charge, and she may have her way. I believe, in my heart, if that Marie were to tell her to jump into the river to-morrow, she would say, ‘ You see that I must do it. Marie is so determined that I cannot deny her anything ! ’ ”

CHAPTER IX.

ONE fine morning, two months subsequent to the events narrated in the last chapter, John Cleveland stood on the corner of the block in which was situated his boarding-house, watching the approach of a street-car. He was arrested in the act of signaling the driver, by a hand upon his arm.

"Good-morning, Mr. Lawrence!" he said, recognizing the gentleman who had taken this liberty with his movements. "Are you going down town?"

"Yes; but will you let that man drive on, and walk a short distance with me? I have something to say to you."

John consented, and the two started down the street, side by side. Mr. Lawrence was the junior member of a large importing house, a man whose gentlemanly bearing and kind heart won for him general esteem. Cleveland had known him well — almost intimately, for many years, and various acts of courtesy and liberality in their business intercourse had given each a high opinion of the other's probity and good-will. John was not surprised, therefore, when his companion assumed a confidential tone in broaching the theme of the proposed conversation.

A very painful, a truly distressing circumstance had come to light in their establishment, within a day or two past, he stated. Some weeks since, suspicions that all was not right was awakened, and a secret investigation was set on foot. The result left no doubt in the minds of the firm that large sums

had been embezzled from time to time, and false entries made to conceal the theft. The guilty party was one to whom they were personally much attached ; a young man trained by themselves, and heretofore trusted to the utmost limit of confidence.

"You must have seen him in our inner office," said Mr. Lawrence, dropping his voice and looking carefully over his shoulder to make sure that he was safe in mentioning names. "Our chief book-keeper, Lorraine."

"Is it possible !" ejaculated the listener. "I know him — that is, I have seen him, but not in your office, I think."

"A handsome, sprightly fellow !" said Mr. Lawrence. "Our Mr. Lawrence, Senior, my worthy uncle, feels an especial fondness for him, Lorraine having been the particular friend of his only son, a fine lad, who died some years ago. The other clerks have manifested a disposition to grumble at Lorraine's rapid promotion, and I have myself once or twice intimated to my uncle that his partiality was perhaps too obvious. But it did honor to his heart, if not to his head. This unworthy conduct on the part of his *protégé* is a sore trial to the old gentleman. I think the ingratitude that characterizes it is the sting that pierces most sharply."

"It is most base, inexcusable !" remarked John. "Is he aware that his crime is discovered ?"

"He suspects that some part of it is known, if he has not learned, by some means, of the search and its result. My uncle left a note upon his desk yesterday afternoon, asking for a private interview in his office this morning — a measure of questionable expediency in my opinion, since, if he is as well informed with regard to our discoveries as I apprehend, he may abscond without meeting us."

"Is it your purpose to expose him ?"

"Yes — and no ! We cannot, in justice to ourselves and others who might employ him in the same capacity he occu-

pies in our establishment, conceal the fact that his own wrongdoing is the cause of his discharge. But we will not prosecute him, or make public the precise nature of his offence. I am thus frank with you, Mr. Cleveland, because I feel, so to speak, the need of a sympathizing listener and adviser. Moreover, you will doubtless hear many false versions of this unpleasant affair, and we wish that a few discreet friends should know the truth in full, that reports reflecting upon ourselves may be contradicted."

John thanked him for the confidence with which he had honored him, and expressed sincere sorrow for what had occurred. It would have been affectation to say that the revelation of Lorraine's villany was as startling to him as to the firm that employed the defaulter, yet he had not expected to hear it so soon. Marian had repeated to her husband and his partner her father's strictures upon the fast young dandy, and Mr. Ainslie had heard hints from other quarters that corroborated the dark sketch. John's personal prejudice against Lorraine was so strong, that a native sense of justice withheld him from passing judgment upon him, even in his own mind, until Mr. Lawrence's disclosure left no room for charitable hesitation.

Mr. Ainslie was already at his desk when his partner entered, and received a pleasant rejoinder to his salutation.

"All well?" asked John, as he seated himself in his office-chair,

The oddity of this question, repeated each morning, seemed never to strike either of them. It was presumed to refer to the Ainslie household proper, which was, in Mr. Ainslie's absence, represented by his wife alone, unless, by a forced interpretation, the servants were included under the friendly inquiry. Will answered as gravely as though he were the patriarch of a numerous flock.

"All well, thank you! at least, all who are at home. Maggie went yesterday to spend a week with Miss Dupont."

"Ah!" and there the conversation stopped.

It was hard work to settle to business this forenoon. John's relations with Maggie were becoming daily more ambiguous. Once, since his formal avowal of attachment to her, he had spoken plainly and warmly of the same, and expressed a wish for her reply. He had taken her hand, and not been repulsed; called her by endearing names, and she had not shrunk from him. But she was overpowered by confusion, mastered by an apparent strife of emotions, and he could not get a single glimpse of the ingenuous countenance that would, he fancied, have told him what he had to hope or fear. Her broken sentences conveyed some acknowledgment of his "goodness" and "generous, undeserved affection," and promised soon, very soon, to end his suspense. At this interesting juncture, the pattering footfall of the invariable marplot, Tiny, was heard approaching, and Maggie darted out of the room by the nearest door.

John was a patient lover, not, as Miss Dupont affirmed, through lukewarmness, but because the very depth of his love instructed him in self-denial. He was one of the very small number of men in this hurrying age of *quid pro quo*, who could fully enter into the meaning of those significant and beautiful words — "And Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and *they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had for her.*"

Latterly, there had stolen into this waiting forebodings that left long shadows upon the heart, although they did not cloud the cheerful face. He disapproved utterly of Maggie's infatuated fondness for Marie Dupont's society. Mrs. Ainslie, with all her expressed distrust of the "French clique," as she styled them, did not observe the effect of this companionship upon

her sister as did John's vigilant eye. She was changed from the bright, happy child he had learned to love. Her spirits were high whenever he met her — apparently exuberant; but her cheeks were oftener flushed than blooming; a deep, burning hue, hard in outline and fixed in its place, instead of the quick, changing carmine that used to fluctuate with every breath. The Misses Boylan were very gay this season, and Maggie plunged into the stream of frolic and frivolity with the desperate mirth of a *blasè* or disappointed votary of pleasure, who seeks excitement to drown thought, rather than the innocent glee of an unsatiated novice. "Those Duponts are doing their utmost to make her as artificial as themselves," Marian said, resentfully, and her husband "wondered why John did not show himself the resolute, sensible fellow he was, and end all this nonsense." It was not that John was blind to any of these growing evils. They all passed in review before him now, as he tried to read and answer letters, to overlook invoices and issue orders. He began to ask himself if patience had not had her perfect work, if it were not for Maggie's good, as well as his happiness, to insist upon having his position defined, not only to himself, but to the mischievous cabal that were striving to mar the pure simplicity of the character he so admired. This sober train of ideas was broken by the entrance of the companion of his morning's walk.

His face wore a look of perplexed concern, and, drawing John aside, he stated that the delinquent clerk had failed to keep the appointment made for him by the senior Lawrence. That this was not accidental, was proved by the fact that the letter, which had been placed upon his desk, was no longer there. Cautious inquiries were then instituted concerning him among his fellow-employees, and two items of information gained. The porter who swept out the store early in the morning testified to having seen Mr. Lorraine enter the counting-room,

shortly after the doors were opened, but he had not thought of watching his movements, and did not notice when he went out. Another clerk stated that, having gone with a friend to the depot of the Hudson River Railroad, at eight o'clock, he had seen Lorraine there, and heard him ask for a ticket to —— station. It occurred to him, he said, that Lorraine looked uneasy, as he bade him "good-morning," in passing, although he gave the circumstance no further thought at the time.

"My object in troubling you with this visit, Mr. Cleveland," said Mr. Lawrence, "is to inquire of you or of Mr. Ainslie, whether you can furnish us with any clue to this unhappy young man's hiding-place. Mr. Ainslie lives so near the station named, that he may be familiar with Lorraine's haunts in that neighborhood. I know that he is in the habit of visiting much up the river, and have heard rumors of his engagement to some lady residing in or near —— . Can you aid us by any suggestions on this head?"

"I believe that I am acquainted with the lady in question," replied John. "But before I accede to your request for suggestions, allow me to inquire how you propose to act in the event of your procuring certain tidings of his whereabouts?"

"I shall seek him in person, perhaps in company with a friend, taking along a private policeman, whose duty it will be to arrest Lorraine, if he cannot be brought away by peaceable measures. If he is disposed to be reasonable, we will try to elicit a confession that may enable us to find out his accomplices, if he has any, and possibly lead to the recovery of some of the stolen money. My uncle cannot be persuaded that a moral lecture will not be beneficial, but my faith in this means of reformation is very weak. Is my explanation satisfactory?"

"Entirely. I can, I think, direct you to the refuge of the runaway. I would ask one favor in return. If you have not selected your companion in this expedition, let me go with you."

“The very thing I was about to ask of you!” said Mr. Lawrence, grasping his hand. “And we have no time to lose.”

In most circumstances, this task of hunting out a fugitive from justice would have been the last office John would have accepted, much less solicited. He foresaw, for himself, the lasting hatred of Lorraine; the scorn and enmity of the Duponts; the calumnies that would be disseminated in gossiping circles, to explain his share in this transaction, and he was not a man who valued his reputation lightly, or underrated the power of evil rumors to tarnish the fairest name. But, opposed to all these dissuasives from the step he proposed, stood the image of Maggie, frightened and trembling at the violent or mournful scenes that might attend the capture of the dishonest clerk. She could not but be horrified beyond degree by the accusation brought against Marie's betrothed, and she had not Marie's hardihood to bear her up under the shock of the discovery and the arrest. At such a moment, she ought to have a protector — a comforter — and he, of all those who loved her, was the only one who could thus serve her. From the moment Mr. Lawrence had mentioned the name upon Lorraine's ticket, John's resolution was taken. If Mrs. Dupont's house were entered on this errand, he would be one of the party, or their forerunner.

The two gentlemen alighted at the wayside station nearest the suspected mansion, about eleven o'clock. The villa stood upon high ground, nearly a mile back from the river, and was approached by a winding road. The policeman, who was dressed in plain clothes, so as not to attract attention, stepped from another car than that which his employer had quitted, and stopped at the little depot while the others walked on. He overtook them at a point where an angle of the road concealed the house from their view.

“All right so far!” he said. “He got off here and went

straight up —” nodding in the direction of the dwelling. “Walk on pretty briskly, if you please, gentlemen. If he sees us coming, he may be off. I wish those front windows did not rake the whole country. If they are on the look-out, they will have plenty of time to disguise him into a Sambo or a grandmother, if he doesn’t care to risk giving leg-bail. I see there is a sort of porter’s lodge at the gate. I shall wait there. If you want me, just wave a handkerchief in that direction, and I am on hand.”

“This must be a beautiful place in summer,” remarked Mr. Lawrence, as they neared the grounds.

He was growing nervous in the anticipation of the task before him, and his companion shared the feeling too much to reply, except by a nod. There was no one visible at the pretty lodge, nor any sign of human life about the lawn or buildings. The villa was spacious and handsome, with a Grecian front, and the lawn sloped from it on all sides. The shrubbery was tied up in matting, and the grass covered with a sort of compost of leaves and straw, to protect it from the biting river winds. John noticed all these things mechanically while he passed up the avenue, and as he stood upon the piazza, awaiting the response to Mr. Lawrence’s ring. They were not detained long. A middle-aged servant in livery, the “Thomas” whom Lorraine had personated on Cleveland’s birth-night, unclosed the door, and returning a grave affirmative to the inquiry whether the ladies were at home, ushered the gentlemen into the parlor.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. DUPONT, a showy, well-dressed woman, arose at the visitors' entrance, with an air of unsuspecting politeness that was an inimitable counterfeit if it were acting.

"Mr. Cleveland!" she said, "I am happy to see you!"

John took her offered hand in some embarrassment, and introduced his friend to her, then to Marie and Maggie, who were also present. The young ladies were seated at a centre-table strewn with worsted and other materials for embroidery. Both were simple *negligés*, and there was nothing in their surroundings and occupation indicative of any previous interruption of their morning's quiet or industry. It was an awkward, and an ungracious undertaking to bring forward the object of their call. Mr. Lawrence felt very much as if he were insulting the courteous hostess, as he made a desperate attempt to open the negotiations.

"I fear, madam, that you will consider this an unwarrantable intrusion of a stranger upon your family circle, nor can I hope that you will regard it in a more favorable light, when you learn the very unpleasant business that has brought me hither."

Mrs. Dupont's features expressed bland surprise; Marie looked up inquiringly; while Maggie paled suddenly, and her shaking fingers could hardly hold, much less guide, her needle. John noted these signs of perturbation, and said, inwardly —

"He is here. She lacks the effrontery that enables the others to dissemble successfully."

"I beg your indulgence, ladies," Mr. Lawrence went on, "if I put questions that may seem to you impertinent, and insist, more earnestly than politely, upon your replies. You are acquainted, I believe, madam, with Mr. Lorraine, lately a book-keeper in our house — the firm of Lawrence & Co.?"

"I am, sir," answered Mrs. Dupont, calmly.

"We have reason to believe that he has wilfully absented himself from our establishment this forenoon, to avoid an investigation which we feel ourselves bound to make of some unpleasant business occurrences that have recently come to our knowledge. Although he may think differently, it is to his interest to grant us an interview. May I inquire, madam, where you last saw this gentleman?"

"I can have no objection to telling you, sir. Mr. Lorraine breakfasted with us this morning."

"Is he in the house at present?"

"He is not."

"Will you inform me at what time he left you?"

"His intention, as he bade us 'good-by,' was to take the nine o'clock train back to New York."

"The nine o'clock train, did you say, madam?"

"I did, sir."

Here was a flaw in the testimony so smoothly given. Mr. Lawrence was shrewd to detect it, and quick to conclude that the suave lady might be capable of further falsification.

"I regret, madam, that I must be so rude as to correct this statement. We have certain evidence that Mr. Lorraine did not leave the city until eight o'clock. You see, at once, that he could not, then, have breakfasted here in season to return by nine."

The widow's rouge was variegated by streaks of natural red, and her eye fell for a second. Marie came to the rescue.

"I could have rectified my mother's mistake as soon as it

was made, sir, had you allowed me an opportunity to speak. Mamma, Mr. Lorraine did not leave this house until half-past nine. We are not accustomed to cross-examination in this law-abiding, peaceful neighborhood, Mr. Lawrence, or we might be more exact in noting the precise hour at which our friends come and depart. Had we supposed that Mr. Lorraine's visit was a matter of such vital consequence to others than ourselves, we would have been ready with our depositions. For my part, I cannot even remember whether he drank one, or two cups of coffee, or ate biscuits instead of cakes."

This scoffing tone was just what John had looked for from her, and Mr. Lawrence bore it the more patiently, in the recollection of Miss Dupont's relation to the concealed culprit. This impulse of compassionate forbearance induced him to turn to another, and, as he supposed, a less interested party.

"Miss Boylan!"

Maggie started convulsively, and her face grew, if possible, of a more ghastly white.

"What is your impression as to the hour of Mr. Lorraine's deserting such pleasant society as this? Was it nine, or half-past, or —" bending a searching gaze upon her — "do you recollect that he left at all?"

Twice Maggie's quivering lips essayed to utter the falsehood she had been instructed to speak. The third time, she almost whispered, "He did go! I do not know when."

"You are certain, then, that he is not on these premises at this time?" pursued Mr. Lawrence, his eye growing more penetrating.

"Your question is an insult, sir!" interposed Marie, with the evident design of covering Maggie's confusion by timely bluster.

"Excuse me, Miss Dupont, but I must have the information I seek from some source. It is better for your friend, Mr.

Lorraine, to fall into my hands than into those of the law he has violated. I know that he came to this place at the hour I have named, and that he has not since appeared at the depot below. This is plain, harsh truth; but it is truth, and must be told. It is of the last importance to Mr. Lorraine, and to those connected with him, that I should find him. If he is concealed in the house —”

“Sir!” Mrs. Dupont arose in awful dignity and stretched her hand towards the bell-knob.

“Before you summon your servants, madam, I deem it but just to inform you that a signal from me will bring an actor upon the scene whom you cannot eject with impunity. There is a policeman within call.”

Maggie uttered a faint scream, and dropped her head upon the table. John could not bear this. He went around to her, and stooping, whispered some words intended to reassure her.

“Do not be frightened, dearest Maggie; unworthy as the fellow is, he will not be punished very severely. Do not let your sympathy with Miss Dupont lead you to imitate her in deception. Be yourself. Speak the truth!”

“I cannot! I cannot!” she moaned, in stifled accents. “Oh! if I had never lived to see this day!”

“Hush! hush, my darling!” John’s hand sought hers under the table. “This disagreeable affair cannot hurt you. Trust me to see that your name is never mixed up in it.”

During this by-play, Marie and her mother held a council on the opposite side of the room. Its decision was announced by Mrs. Dupont, who had recovered her self-assured manner.

“The shortest, and, as it seems to me, the only satisfactory manner of settling this dispute, sir, is to summon your policeman and instruct him to search the premises. Our solemn assurances having been inadequate to convince you that we are not harboring the person you seek, it remains to be proved

what can be discovered by other means. Only, sir, remember that if this examination is as ineffectual as the other, the consequences of your behavior on this occasion will fall upon yourself."

Mr. Lawrence deliberated for a moment — then saying, "I am willing to abide them!" stepped to the door and waved his handkerchief.

The policeman received his orders in the hall, Mr. Lawrence returning to the parlor when he had given them. A dead silence reigned in the apartment. Mrs. Dupont sat in lofty hauteur, her black eyes fixed upon vacancy. Marie resumed her work, ignoring the presence of the gentlemen, only a nervous twitching of the swift fingers evidencing her secret disquiet. Mr. Lawrence stood at a window overlooking the river. Mr. Cleveland watched Maggie, in anxious pity. She remained still as a marble statue, her head bowed upon the table, her fingers interlocked upon her lap.

We have heard of men, who, in the death hour, lamented over the wayward thoughts that wandered from the dread issue pending upon the few, brief remaining minutes of time, to trivialities totally dissociated from the scene and hour. We have felt our own mind, at the actual instant of life's sorest bereavement, turning aside, as in sheer inability or perverse unwillingness to receive the terrible consciousness of present woe, to remark such paltry objects as the wry fold of a curtain; a medicine stain upon the pillow; the creases of the disordered coverlet. Yet all the while the horror of the great empty darkness was over us; the heart was wrung to the last gasp with anguish; we knew, while we reproached ourselves for the unnatural digression of fancy, that our thoughts were like cowardly children, striving to sing and sport in the night, their very efforts a proof how they feared the dense gloom enshrouding them.

Maggie knew this to be the most critical moment of her existence. If the fugitive were tracked to his covert, the disgrace to herself might be more public than if he made good his retreat, but, in any event, disclosure was inevitable. The thing she most feared was close upon her; she saw no loophole of escape. She waited as sits the criminal in the cart that bears him along the vista lined with living faces of curiosity and horror, all staring upon him, and closed at the farther end by the gallows. Yet fragmentary gleams of other days and far different scenes played across her brain; the faces and forms of her school-fellows; quiet sunset sails upon the river with Marie, before Lorraine's image had troubled the girl's pure fancy; how she dressed for her maiden ball (how long ago it seemed!); the pattern of the bouquet-holder she carried then; how John looked in his dressing-gown and smoking-cap, on the evening they were given him; the programme of the last opera she had attended, when John and Will made up a private party of four, and went from Mr. Ainslie's house, and Tiny never suspected the frolic; snatches of the songs she heard then, wild, airy cadences, and difficult arias, and solemn measured marches; — O, what was she doing! how could such themes engage thought now, when the present peril was narrowing in upon her!

"Maggie!" said John, softly, touching her hand. "Do not look so startled! I want to speak with you alone. Can I?"

She got up to accompany him to another room, but Marie checked the movement.

"I suppose, Mr. Lawrence, that, as matters stand, it is expedient that none of us leave the parlor until your emissary has finished his search. Mr. Cleveland, as your ally, is above suspicion, but Miss Boylan may hereafter be arraigned for having aided in the escape of this persecuted — *prosecuted*, I should say — gentleman."

"Your suggestion is not without weight," returned Mr. Lawrence, unruffled by her sarcasm. "Mr. Cleveland, may I beg you to remain with us!"

John bit his lip to repress a caustic rejoinder, and, resolved not to be baffled in his purpose, conducted Maggie to a bay window at the other end of the long drawing-room. There he placed her upon a cushioned seat lining the recess, and standing between her and the two at the centre-table, began, in soothing tones, an account of the real state of this unfortunate affair, and the leniency of the firm whose goodness Lorraine had abused.

"I am very sorry you happened to be here to-day. It is a sad shock to you, through your love for Miss Dupont. Yet, reflect how much better it is for her that this should happen now, before she is irrevocably bound to him. If she were his wife, there would indeed be cause for —"

He broke off abruptly, attracted by the spectacle of the policeman passing before their window which opened upon the rear lawn. Mr. Lawrence, too, had turned when he heard the man come down stairs.

"What is the fellow about? He cannot be through already!" he muttered, and catching a glimpse of him as he crossed the yard, he joined Cleveland at his look-out. Mrs. Dupont and her daughter likewise arose, curiosity or solicitude mastering their pride, and gathered, with the others, into the recess. Marie laughed scornfully as she did so.

"There is to be an *al fresco* performance also, it seems?"

No one replied, and all eyes watched the strange, yet confident motions of the officer. The shrubbery was abundant in this part of the grounds, and Mr. Lawrence's conjecture was that, from an upper window, the detective had espied some suspicious object among the trees. But he did not pry into the clumps of evergreens that dotted the lawn. He walked

slowly, but straight up to a pyramid of matting, erected in plain view of the spectators, but at some distance from the house, and halted. The miniature tent apparently covered a favorite vine or tree, having been constructed with unusual care, and pinned closely to the ground. The man walked around it, eyeing it keenly in all its parts, and then laid his ear to its side as if to listen for breath or movement within.

This action partially prepared the excited watchers for his next, which was to clasp the matting in his arms, and throw it to the ground. A wild exclamation burst from Maggie's lips, and she fell back fainting. Marie and her mother darted forward to her assistance. Mr. Lawrence's attention was wholly given to what was passing without. He, alone, of the group inside, saw the officer drag from the ruins of his hiding-place, a struggling figure, his clothes and hair filled with straw and dust, his face livid with rage and terror, and eyes glaring like a wild beast at bay.

Thomas, the stout serving-man, who had, from some corner, witnessed the downfall of the hiding-place his young mistress had planned, and he reared, now ran into sight with manifest design of rescue, but Mr. Lawrence thwarted him by springing from the window and hastening to the scene of action to claim his prisoner.

John Cleveland stood motionless in the midst of the tumult. He did not know, and did not care that the arrest was a thing accomplished. Maggie's insensible form was born past him by menial hands, and he saw it not, any more than he heard Marie's appeal to himself to interfere in Lorraine's behalf. His glassy eyes beheld only the expression of horror and misery that had distorted Maggie's features at the moment of discovery; the shuddering depths of his soul echoed and re-echoed her agonized shriek —

“Spare him! Oh, spare *my husband!*”

CHAPTER XI.

IN a small room of a fourth-rate boarding-house, Maggie Lorraine sat, one autumn afternoon, three years after her secret marriage. The furniture of the apartment was dingy and ill-matched, evidently consisting of superfluous or cast-off articles from other portions of the establishment. Through an open door was visible the interior of the chamber adjoining, a mere closet, just large enough to hold a bed and washstand, and ventilated, as well as warmed, from the so-called parlor. There was a fire in the grate, for the day was cold, and Maggie's chair was drawn close to it. Upon the rug at her feet, was a pretty delicate-looking child, a little over two years old, whose striking resemblance to her once beautiful mother impressed the most casual observer. She was busy with a pile of wooden blocks, building houses, which she, ever and anon, called upon her parent to admire. Maggie's answer was always a fond smile and pleasant word, but such smiles and forced cheerfulness as would have deceived no one but a baby. The transient and sickly gleam made yet sadder the wan cheek and thoughtful brow. Disappointment, the tortures of a wounded spirit, and the wearing cares of her daily life had left unmistakable imprints upon her features. She looked nearer thirty, than twenty-two years of age.

Her very hands bore traces of toil, such as had never disfigured their shapely outlines in her girlish days. Besides the sweeping, dusting, etc., necessary to keep her rooms in order,

the slender fingers were used to plying the needle many hours of each day — sometimes, when her husband was absent, far into the night. He never suspected that she had so far demeaned herself and him, as to beg of their landlady the privilege of doing plain and fancy sewing for her, that their board-bill might not go altogether unpaid. His wife had learned the lesson of necessary deceits too well in other days, not to practise it now when it seemed needful. He did wonder, sometimes, that the grim-faced hostess was not more restive, when he paid her only a part of the sum due her, and this forbearance induced him to patronize her house for a longer period than a gentleman of his tastes would have been likely to endure its want of style and lack of minor comforts. After all, it was a matter of small moment to him what kind of place his wife and child called home. He seldom saw the interior of it from breakfast until late at night. But for her babe, Maggie, with her social, loving disposition, would have been wretchedly lonely. Her old acquaintances had ostracized her, or dropped off by degrees, after the news of her marriage and rumors of her husband's disgrace were spread abroad. Her family had renounced her utterly, and she had not the heart or courage to seek other associates.

Therefore, when she heard the sound of coming footsteps, and sweeping silken skirts along the thinly-carpeted, narrow hall, she had no thought that she was to be blest with a call, until there came a rap at the door. The color rushed up into her face as she opened it, and she saw Marie, now Mrs. Clement Lorraine. The two kissed one another, but it was a frigid, meaningless salute, very unlike the fervent greeting of olden times.

"How do, little one?" said Marie, brushing the forehead of her niece with her cold lips.

"She is not very well," answered Maggie, drawing the

wondering creature closer to her side. It was an involuntary impulse to secure to herself something of comfort and sincerity, during the heartless conversation she expected. "She was threatened with the croup, last night."

"No wonder!" Mrs. Clement seated herself in the most respectable chair of the poor collection, drawing up her flounces as if she feared they would be soiled by contact with the faded carpet. "No wonder! when you keep her cooped up in this place, from one week's end to the other. Of course, if a breath of fresh air reaches her, she takes cold. I send Clement out for an airing every day, when it is not actually storming. The consequence is, his health is perfect."

Maggie thought, but did not say, that Master Clement Lorraine, seated upon the nursery-maid's lap, wrapped in a furred mantle, and rolling in a close carriage down Broadway, might reasonably be less liable to take cold than her darling, holding to her mother's hand, and tottering over the muddy or slippery pavements in this unfashionable quarter of the city. She reflected, moreover, upon the slight inconvenience it would occasion Mrs. Lorraine, her lazy coachman, and well-fed horses, to drive by, occasionally, on damp days, and invite baby Louise to share in the "airing" that wrought such salutary results to her boy-cousin.

But she only said, "I blame myself for having taken her to walk, yesterday. I had no idea the weather was so raw before I went out. She was not very warmly clad, either. And that reminds me of a surprise which I had to-day. Perhaps you can tell me what kind friend has remembered my daughter in this way."

She took from a drawer an embroidered child's cloak of softest merino, a blue silk hood, and a pair of tiny rubber boots, lined with wool and edged with fur. If she had truly imagined that these acceptable additions to her babe's wardrobe

came from her husband's rich brother or his wife, Marie's countenance undeceived her. Her ignorance as to their donor was genuine, and with her scant praises of the articles, there was mingled ill-concealed surprise that any one should have thought enough of the child to present them.

"It must have been Marian, or perhaps poor mamma!" sighed Maggie, as she laid them back. "I cannot bring myself to believe that they have ceased entirely to care for me."

"They choose a singular method of showing their affection," remarked Mrs. Clement. "It is a pity they do not drop the anonymous and do something to aid you, instead of wasting money upon unsuitable finery for Louise."

Maggie's heart swelled. As if her pure lily-bud were not entitled to as much of the sunshine of life as the pampered nursling of the speaker's rich conservatory! She picked up her work and went on with it, in silence. Marie eyed it almost angrily. It was a slip of white cambric, too small for Louise, and in its very pattern and size, a mute and touching appeal to a mother's heart.

"You are extravagant in your preparations," said the wealthy sister. "That cambric is altogether too fine for such a purpose. I should think that you had enough of Louise's clothes left to obviate the necessity of making up new ones now."

"Louise wore out nearly everything. I altered whatever I could for her last summer's wear. And this cambric is not new. It is part of a wrapper which I had before I was married."

There was no hidden meaning in the rejoinder. It was the truth, simply spoken, but even Marie's bold forehead felt a glow of shame. "Before I was married!" Ah! there was no need of economical contrivances then! The phrase had a significance and a pathos that reached the vain, world-hardened heart of

the summer friend. Reached — but not melted. The memory of the guileless school-fellow, her docile pupil and loving slave; the happy, popular daughter of a luxurious home; the passive instrument in her hands, when she urged the step that had made her the broken-hearted woman she now saw before her, all this stung Marie into a sort of impatient resentment towards the one upon whose injuries it made her uncomfortable to dwell.

Louise had settled down quietly again to her blocks, and Maggie's patient features retained no mark of wounded feeling. Outwardly, there was nothing Mrs. Lorraine could lay hold of as a text for the lecture she had come to deliver. So, she had to begin out of the abundance of her inborn discontent.

"My visit to-day is partly on business, Maggie. Clement wanted me to see you and talk to you about the way Albert is going on. It is really too bad that he should show such disregard of the feelings, and so neglect the interests of a brother, who had sacrificed so much on his account. You must know that his habits of dissipation are growing worse and worse."

She paused, but Maggie made no reply.

"I need scarcely remind you, Maggie, of what was your husband's situation at the time of Clement's return from abroad. But for his charity in taking Albert into his employment, when every one else shunned him, you would have been homeless and penniless long ago. But what sign of gratitude has Albert ever showed to his benefactor? I am sorry to say it to you, but you ought to know that his behavior, from first to last, has been unpardonable. Clement was too prudent to put him into a position of much responsibility, but, few as were his opportunities of betraying trust, he has contrived to do mischief; has bitten the hand that fed him. Only yesterday there came to light a transaction which displayed such wanton carelessness on his part, or intentional foul play, that the other members of the

firm have insisted upon his discharge. Of course, Clement could urge nothing against so necessary a measure."

Maggie's work fell from her hand.

"O, Marie! what will he do? what will become of us?"

"Just what I said to Clement, my dear! And his answer was, that it was high time Albert was forced to see the consequences of his evil practices. You cannot expect a man to ruin himself, even for his own brother. Clement has exhibited wonderful patience."

"I know it! He befriended us when no one else did. I am deeply grateful to him. But if he would only give us one more trial! You have unbounded influence with him, Marie. Will you not use it in our behalf?"

"Really, Maggie, you are going too far!" returned Mrs. Clement, in a tone of displeasure. "There are limits to everything. I feel an interest in you, and pity for your child; but I cannot deny that the alienation between Albert and myself is now complete. I have been bitterly disappointed in him throughout, and I could never yield my consent to his brother's further test of one he has found so unworthy. A little consideration would have taught you the impropriety of your request."

Maggie had taken her baby into her arms, and the tears fell fast upon the sadly perplexed little face that looked up into hers.

"My darling, this is dreadful news for you!"

Mrs. Lorraine became more and more vexed, as she felt herself growing uneasy at this scene.

"This is a most disagreeable task for me," she resumed. "The thought of it has made me nervous all day. I told Clement just how you would take it. I wish you had more energy, more self-command, Maggie. This weak way of breaking down under every trial has occasioned you a vast deal of

unhappiness. Clement and I were saying to-day, that if you were a person of more character, of firmer will, you might do much to guide your husband back to the right path. It is always a wife's fault, in part, if her husband throws himself away. You ought to take a decided stand with Albert, and say — 'I *will* do thus and so! I will not do that!' Your passive, yielding disposition, has been your great snare in life."

"No one knows that better than you do, Marie!" The bruised, crushed, insulted creature, gathered strength to retort from the very pain that racked her. "It was never more my snare than when I weakly, wickedly allowed myself to be persuaded by you and him, whom you then eulogized, as much as you now condemn, into the private marriage that has ruined me for time, if not for eternity. I was a sick, nervous, unworldly child. You were a strong-minded, strong-willed woman. I had leaned upon, and clung to you, until I had no judgment of my own. You took me away from my father's house, out of the hands of a loving, tender sister, whom I would never, of myself, have estranged. You could argue, and I could not. You coaxed and caressed, and I could never withstand the entreaties of those I loved. From the hour when you almost dragged me to the altar and encouraged me to repeat the vows, I was too faint and terrified to comprehend, until the present time, I have not had one moment of real happiness. O, Marie! Marie! upon me has fallen all the punishment of that rash, fatal step; but surely, I was not the only one to blame!"

Mrs. Lorraine fairly lost her breath with wrathful astonishment. If the stones she trod upon in the streets had cried out against her, she could hardly have marvelled more than at this appeal from the meek, long-suffering friend of her youth. Her love for Maggie had waned so naturally, as it was overgrown by other and more selfish interests, that she had not noted the

hour of its death, had never confessed that it was no longer in being. She had no difficulty in persuading herself that the flame, she used to declare was deathless, had gone out like a candle in a puff of wind, before the outburst of recrimination from the "poor relation" she had insulted. In all the majesty of offended dignity, she arose, and drew her India shawl about her shoulders.

"If this is the state of your mind towards me, Mrs. Albert Lorraine, it is useless, worse than useless, for me to prolong this visit. I came here with the kindest intentions, to break as gently as possible, intelligence that I thought would afflict you. I offered my advice in the spirit that has ever characterized my conduct towards you — a disinterestedness as pure, as I now perceive that it was ill-directed. That your marriage has been unfortunate, and mine happy, may be a source of mortification to you ; but a sense of what is decent and becoming in a wife ought, it seems to me, to prevent such a tirade of reproaches as you have just launched at me. Since you choose to be independent of me, to despise my friendship, I have no disposition to resist your decision. I hope that you and your husband will be more prosperous without the aid of *my* husband and myself, than you have been with it. Good afternoon !"

Maggie had made no response as the incensed dame swept from the room, shaking off the dust from her feet upon the worn carpet, that could not have sustained any sensible damage had the said dust been literal, instead of figurative. And this was the *finale* of an endless friendship.

CHAPTER XII.

FOR a long while after Mrs. Clement's departure, the mother sat rocking her child in mute sorrow, holding the little figure tightly to her breast with the bewildered, dizzy feeling, that it was the one object upon earth to which she could cling, for cling and twine such natures as hers must and will, until death loosens the tendrils' hold.

Louise submitted to the silent embrace, without complaint. She was a sensitive, affectionate babe, and had learned, at this early age, that she was not only her mother's companion, but her sole comfort. Now and then, the small hand stole quietly up to the tear-stained cheek of her parent, and the pretty mouth was held up for a kiss, and once she sighed — a sound too full of thought and sorrow to have its rise in so young a heart — and murmured, half aloud, "Poor mamma!"

Maggie's very infant pitied and fondled her. It was the natural impulse with all who knew her, unless the kindlier feelings of humanity were dead or perverted within them. With the twilight, came the summons to tea, and although sickening at the thought of food, she arose with Louise in her arms, and went down stairs. It was contrary to the landlady's rules to have children at the table unless full price were paid for their board; but in consideration of Mr. Lorraine's frequent absences, and his wife's valuable services with her needle, the presence of Louise was graciously allowed by the presiding genius of the inelegant feasts, and welcomed by most of the

boarders. It was especially agreeable to the "gentlemen," as Mrs. Richards, the proprietress of the establishment, called them, their interest in the engaging, well-behaved child being enhanced by the respectful sympathy they felt for the neglected wife and devoted mother. Maggie's meals were thus rendered more tolerable than might have been expected by one in her unprotected position. Already she recognized her child's beneficent influence upon her daily life, and, in her more sanguine moments, hoped that it might accomplish great things for her in the future.

Having finished her slight repast, and seen that Louise's appetite was satisfied, she wended her way up to the dismal "third story back," without waiting for her husband's return. It was a rare circumstance, indeed, when the little girl's lips received a good-night kiss from "papa." She knew almost all of the men, who plied her with biscuits and sweet cakes down stairs, better than she did him, and certainly loved several of them more. Still, when she knelt at her mother's knee, after she was undressed, and repeated the simple nursery prayer,

"Now I lay me down to sleep,"

she added, by her teacher's dictation — "Pray God bless and take care of dear papa and mamma!" coupling the names upon her tongue, if never within her heart. Soon she slept the happy sleep of infancy, and Maggie could weep or work, uninterrupted.

Scarcely an hour had been worn away in mechanical toil and dreary musings, when a well-known tread upon the stair announced the unexpectedly early arrival of her lord. The step was heavy, but not firm. It had a peculiar, and even to uninitiated ears, an unpleasant shuffle at every few paces, and Maggie's uneasy expression showed that it was no strange sound to her. She had just time to hide her work and draw Louise's

cradle further into the shade and quite out of the way of any one sitting by the hearth, when Lorraine fumbled at the door for the lock. His wife opened it.

“Hullo, Mag!” he said, chucking her under the chin, “it’s well you let some light into that dirty hole of an entry. When we get into our new house, there will be an end of such filthy arrangements.”

He was half-intoxicated, according to his nightly custom; but he was in a good humor, which was a more uncommon occurrence. When this was the case, he was boastful in prophecies of better—that is, richer days, predictions that had, long ago, ceased even to tantalize his wife’s imagination, much less awaken any hopes of their fulfilment. She was only thankful that his mood was not surly or violent. He was often both, and abused her in terms of shocking vulgarity and profanity, and, more than once, her timid attempts to pacify him had brought down the weight of his heavy arm upon her shrinking form. She bore it all! she, the shy, delicate girl, who had always trembled at a harsh word from the father, whose control, by contrast with this ruffian’s rule, seemed like the reign of peace and gentleness. To whom could she complain? Besides this man, she had no protector in the wide world, and cruel as were his tender mercies, she had no alternative but to endure whatever he chose to lay upon her.

Every wife is dependent, no matter what may be her fortune or strength of character, and seldom, indeed, even among those who are styled “good husbands,” are found those shining examples to the rest of their sex and the world—men, who seek to convert this dependence into a glory—who would esteem it a lasting shame to themselves, if their wives had ever the least occasion to look back longingly to lost liberty, or to speculate secretly, whether wifedom—after all that has been said

and written to dignify it — be anything more than honorable and licensed beggary.

Maggie had no speculations on the subject. She was the abject slave of this one of the masters of creation, who lolled before the fire in his arm-chair, bloated, and red-eyed ; his breath hot and rank with brandy and tobacco ; rowdyish in dress ; foul and blasphemous in talk ; such a sight as men despise, and angels weep to behold. He had never possessed any refinement, except the polished surface, and the corroding atmosphere of evil associations had joined to inward corruption to destroy the thin crust.

He laughed aloud several times, after he took his seat, looking into the fire, and rubbing his swollen hands in drunken glee. At last he spoke.

“ Great news, old girl ! great news ! ”

“ Indeed ! ” said Maggie, sadly, thinking how soon his mood would change, when she summoned courage to tell *her* news.

“ The best joke going ! Clem. has turned me out of doors ! given me my walking papers ! ”

Maggie stared at him like one petrified. Was he really mad, that he could jest at irrevocable ruin ?

He chuckled again. “ Yes ! genteelly kicked me out ! He couldn’t do anything ungenteel, you know. Paid me my wages, and threw in a moral lecture free gratis, *and* for nothing ! Says I crook my elbow too often ! throw too many cards ! don’t attend to business ! am a disgrace and a nuisance. Pious saint, he is ! Says he has given me six hundred a year ever since he came home, just to keep me and you out of the almshouse ; that I’ve done him a deal of harm, and no good. Ha ! ha ! I’m glad to hear that I have hurt him a little, the sneaking, canting hypocrite ! Wish I could have ruined him ! He says I must never show my face in his house again. It’s a better-looking phiz than his, that’s one comfort. And now comes the

fun of the thing. As I was coming up town, whom should I meet but Jim Dolan, a first rate fellow, and a grand friend of mine. So we turned into an oyster-saloon to take supper together — his treat, you understand. Before we got to the bottom of one glass, I told him what a fix I was in. He brought me a slap on the back that made me jump, and says he: ‘Old fellow, you are just the chap for my use!’”

But we are sick of writing, and we are sure that our readers are of perusing this stuff, which, purified as it is, from the senseless oaths interjected at every breath, still remains disgusting slang. The sense of his communication, as nearly as Maggie could make it out, was that this Dolan was the proprietor of a gambling-house in St. Louis, a branch of one of longer standing in New York, and had engaged him, Lorraine, to act as door-keeper and decoy to the concern. The two worthies were to set out for the West that night at twelve o’clock.

Maggie was stunned by the tidings. This shameless confession of the nature of his calling; the delight he expressed in undertaking it, the jocular indifference with which he prepared to leave her and his child, for weeks, perhaps for months, gave Maggie a clearer realization than she had ever had before, of the thorough perversion of every right sentiment; the deadening of natural affection within him. Afraid to remonstrate, she set to work, by his directions, to collect and make ready the clothes he was to take with him. He packed his cigars, meerschaum, and a travelling case of liquors; then re-seated himself, and smoked at his ease, while the weary, patient woman attended to the rest. Once, as she was getting together his socks and handkerchiefs, she opened the drawer where lay the anonymous gifts, but she was too sick-hearted to display them, and listen to his silly conjectures as to the giver. He was very talkative, and evidently took to himself great credit

for endeavoring to keep her spirits up, under the approaching affliction of parting with so exemplary a companion.

"Don't you think I met that scoundrel Cleveland, twice, to-day?" he said, by and by.

With all the vindictiveness of a mean nature, he had hated John, since the day on which the latter had witnessed his capture by Mr. Lawrence's agent, and his knowledge of Cleveland's feelings towards Maggie, prior to the announcement of her marriage, did not detract from this enmity. He never named him without a curse and abusive term, and his wife learned, at a very early period of their wedded life, that it was dangerous to attempt the defence of her friend. She said nothing now, and he talked on. "The first time, I came upon him in a fancy store. I don't mind letting you into the secrets of my flirtations, once in a while, and I may as well say, out and out, that I ate a philopena with a lady at a party the other night, and she met me in the street to-day and caught me. So, I stepped into this place, you see, to pick up some trifle to send her, and, as I went in, I passed this puppy standing at the front counter. He did not see me, although I brushed right by him. He was busy looking at baby-cloaks."

"Baby-cloaks!" Maggie ejaculated, imprudently.

"Yes!" bursting into a horse-laugh. "I guess he is training up another wife to his hand, and means to begin, this time, before she is out of long clothes. Hope she will serve him exactly as you did! When I came out, he was in the same place, and had a blue cap or bonnet, or something of that kind on his fist, studying it with a most solemnly face. I vow it was the most ridiculous sight I ever saw in all my born days! But he was always a milk-sop and a spooney!"

Maggie was kneeling by the trunk, with her back to her husband. He could not see the convulsed features, or the great, scalding drops, that bedewed the garments she was pretending

to pack. It was the bitterest moment of her life ; but how was he to suspect it ? How could he imagine that his down-trodden thrall dared to compare his conduct, in letting his wife and infant suffer for the necessary comforts of existence, while he squandered his earnings upon the vile companion of his disreputable orgies, for thus, she rightly interpreted the errand that took him to the store — and the secret benefaction of the one who, of all mankind, had most reason to despise her ?

“ I met him to-night, face to face, right under a street-lamp,” continued Lorraine. “ Jim and I were walking, arm-in-arm, and laughing fit to split our sides at one of Jim’s stories. He is the wittiest dog in creation — Irish humor, you know. It was at a crossing, and this rascal, seeing us coming, stepped one side to give us a wide berth, afraid of soiling his respectability, I suppose, if he touched a pair of jolly tipplers. I was on the side next to him, and we looked one another straight in the eyes. I saw his countenance change as he recognized me. He turned as white as a sheet, and then his eye flashed, and his lip curled as if he were a king, and I a hog in his path. I tell you, I swore at him handsomely by name ; and if Dolan had not held my arm so tight, I would have laid him in the gutter in no time. There is an account to be settled between us yet. I have not forgotten it, if he has ! ”

Maggie’s tears were all dried as she arose, and asked, steadily, “ what else there was to do ? ”

“ That’s all, I guess. Upon my word, it’s eleven o’clock ! I haven’t a second to lose. See here, old lady ! ” (he pulled out his pocket-book), “ I need every cent I can rake and scrape to pay my expenses out West. Dolan would do it, he says, but he is hard up, just now, for cash. Here is an X for you, to keep that old she-dragon down stairs quiet until I can forward more. When my fortune is made, we will sink her and her pig-sty. I’ll let you hear from me when I am settled, and if

trade is brisk, maybe I'll send for you to come out and pass the winter in St. Louis."

"How shall I direct my letters?" asked Maggie.

"I can't say, yet. Don't write until you hear from me. Good-by! Don't cry your pretty eyes out, when I am gone!"

He kissed her, and ran noisily down stairs to send a porter up for his trunk. Ten minutes later, it too was gone, and no vestige of his recent presence remained in the room, except the blended fumes of bad cigars and worse liquor. Maggie threw up the windows that the noxious air might not poison her child, then tucked the cradle-blanket closely about the tender little throat.

"He forgot you, my angel!" she murmured. "He left no kiss for his baby, but never mind, darling! You and your mother are left to one another, and he will soon forget me too!"

There was no philosophy in this calm calculation of a possibility that would have wrung blood from the heart of most wives. It was unfeigned apathy, the candid expression of one whose love for her husband had never been more than a girlish fancy, fostered, if not engendered by the representations of a wily and dangerous friend, and which, being formed only for holiday use, had soon worn out. She felt lonely and forsaken, as the midnight chimes rang out, but her thoughts turned to other days and other associates.

Deep would have been Lorraine's wrath, and bitter his imprecations, if he had known that his wife's last look that night, was at the identical cloak and hat he had ridiculed Cleveland for buying, and the only tears she shed after his going, were those that filled her eyes, as she whispered — "If I should die, there is one noble heart that would not let my baby starve, for the sake of what her mother once was!"

CHAPTER XIII.

IF Lorraine did not forget the helpless pair he had left in the "she-dragon's" den, he took no pains to assure them of his continued remembrance. A month rolled by, and the promised letter did not arrive. The meagre morsel he had given his wife wherewith to appease the rapacity of the monster, as he chose to consider the industrious woman whose leniency to him and his far exceeded his deserts, was paid over within two days after he left, and Maggie, now thrown entirely upon her own resources, was so far confidential with the landlady as to inform her of her penniless state until her husband should send her money, and solicit, through her, work of the other boarders. To the honor of human nature be it said, that they not only responded cordially to the appeal, but the men, most of them clerks with slender salaries, privately raised a purse among themselves, and presented it to Mrs. Richards in liquidation of the claim upon the Lorraines. Maggie's gift of acquiring friends had not deserted her, and, although exerted unconsciously, still had its effect upon those who were brought into communication with her.

Mrs. Richards had a homely face and a harsh voice, but she was by no means unpopular with the majority of her mixed household. She could drive a bargain with the keenest man of business there. She could ill afford to lose a dollar, and she never did, without a vigorous effort to secure it. She despised Lorraine, as a "good-for-nothing loafer," a "would-be swell," and

a "real cheat," and would have bundled him out of the house upon the first pay-day, but for the unoffending sufferers in her third-story back. Louise was the only baby in the house, and reminded her of one she had lost twenty years before, and she made no secret, except in Maggie's hearing, of her opinion that poor Mrs. Lorraine was a martyr, and was "paying dearly for her foolishness in having married that dissipated, lazy husband of hers." It is certain that she would not have given Maggie notice to quit, had the board remained unpaid, but as it was, she was very glad that she was not the loser by this fresh villany on the part of one whom she now regarded as an absconded debtor.

So the month had passed — a week — a fortnight followed it — and there were no tidings of the absentee, and Maggie began to look forward with serious forebodings to the Spring and the probable event it would bring, the trial for which she could make so little preparation. Each day diminished the chance that she would be able to go to her husband, should he send for her, and if he failed to supply her with the means of paying her daily expenses, what was to become of her?

"The burningest shame I ever knew!" said Mrs. Richards to her daughter, one morning, as the two were clearing away the breakfast things. "And I have seen my full share of the wrong side of this life. I don't believe that rogue has the least idea of coming back. He has turned that poor young thing loose upon the world to pick up her living as she can. He can't abide me, but he isn't too nice to leave his family upon my charity. It just amounts to that, for he doesn't know that she ever took in sewing, or that the boarders have raised a subscription."

"I wonder how her rich relations would take it if they knew all!" remarked the daughter. "To my notion they are as much to blame as he is."

"No, they aren't. She offended and disgraced them by a secret marriage with this disrespectful fellow. I've heard it said that they never guessed that he was even courting her, until he was taken up for some rascality — robbing his employers, or some such thing — and she went into hysterics about it, and lo, and behold! they had been married two months, and nobody the wiser, except Mrs. Clement Lorraine — Miss Dupont she was then. He was living with the Lawrences, and they would not prosecute him, although he had robbed them of several hundred dollars. 'Twould have been better for her if he had been sent to Sing Sing for ten years. Her father is a proud, high-tempered man, they say, and he vowed she should never cross his threshold again, and none of the family would have anything to do with this Lorraine. I've heard that her married sister would receive her any day she would leave him; but he would never let her go near them. I dare say they take it for granted that she is well enough off, seeing that he had a situation with his brother. She behaved very imprudent — there's no denying that — but she has found out that the way of the transgressor is hard. I think her mother would pity her, if she could see her now."

"A gentleman, ma'am!" said the maid-of-all work, at the door.

There was no mistaking him for anything but a gentleman, thought Mrs. Richards, as she stepped into the hall where he stood.

He bowed respectfully. "Mrs. Richards, I believe!"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you a lady amongst your boarders by the name of Lorraine?"

"I have, sir. Her parlor is No. 12, third story back — or stay! Norah! show this gentleman up to Mrs. Lorraine's room."

Maggie felt unusually depressed this morning. Her strength

was giving way under the unintermitting strain upon body and mind. She had no appetite, and Mrs. Richards' best food was not tempting to an invalid. She took up her sewing as soon as she returned to her room; but her hands trembled with nervous exhaustion, and her temples throbbed with such pain that she was fain to close her eyes and rest her brow upon the work-stand before her. She did not raise it until Norah followed up her knock at the door by throwing it open, and calling out in her broadest brogue:

"Mrs. Lorraine! here's a gentleman to see ye!"

And lifting her frightened, haggard face, Maggie saw Will Ainslie standing on the threshold.

Forgotten now was the part he had taken in exiling her from his house as her parents had done from theirs; forgotten his long, cruel silence; his seeming forgetfulness of her existence, his slights to her husband and child! She only thought of this goodness in the past, and her base requital of it all.

Springing forward with a scream of mingled joy and anguish, she fell upon her knees at his feet.

"Will! Brother! Oh, forgive me!"

She remembered nothing more distinctly, until she found herself stretched upon the hard sofa, and Mrs. Richards' face, wet with tears, bending over her.

"Mrs. Richards!" she said, faintly. "Oh, I have had such a sweet, blessed dream!"

"It was not a dream, dear Maggie!" Will came forward from behind the couch. "I have come to take you home — to your own old home, where you can stay as long as you like."

Maggie smiled and sat upright, like one who has quaffed a potent cordial.

"But —" added Will, seriously and cautiously. "It will be a sad visit to you — to us all. Can you bear sorrow, better than you did joy, just now?"

"I ought to be able to do so," rejoined she, involuntarily, speaking out the thought that arose in her mind. "I am used to suffering."

"But this trial is an unexpected one. Your father died suddenly last night!"

"Died!" repeated Maggie, clasping her hands. "Died! and I never made my peace with him!" She burst into tears.

Will had no comfort to give her. Mr. Boylan's attack had been severe from the commencement. He had sustained severe losses in trade that had depressed him much for a fortnight past, and probably tended to bring on a fit of apoplexy. He did not speak coherently from the moment of his seizure until his death, which occurred six hours afterwards. It was a terrible stroke to the family. Mrs. Boylan had borne it best of all, to the surprise of those around her. It was her proposition and earnest request, that the disowned daughter should be sent for.

"Dear mamma!" said Maggie, as she heard this. "I have never doubted that she loved me." Then, as she observed Will's pained look, she continued, putting her hand within his: "I have blamed none of you, dear brother. I had forfeited your esteem, abused your confidence, deceived you in every respect. I was no more worthy to be counted as one of your number."

This lowliness of spirit had in it no savor of affectation, and before it the feeble remains of Will's just displeasure against the truant faded into air.

When he drew in his smoking horses before the late residence of his father-in-law, and lifted out the pale, trembling daughter and her infant, he was as truly her knight and stanch defender as of yore, resolved to maintain her cause to the last, though Marian herself should be his opponent.

Tiny and Marian were with their mother in her room, and while both heard the subdued bustle of arrival in the lower hall, and knew what it portended, neither stirred to receive the new comers. There was, instead, a perceptible toss of Tiny's head, ever ready to execute this movement, and a hardening of Marian's features into inflexibility of resolution. Both women were proud in their way, and Maggie's career had been to them the most deadly mortification, the heaviest sorrow of their lives. They imagined her changed into such a character as befitted Lorraine's wife and Marie Dupont's scholar, and for this creature, Marian's dislike was fully as inveterate as Tiny's. Each, rapidly and silently, reviewed the circumstances of her union with the thief and gambler, the consternation, distress, the disgrace that ensued to themselves, and the twain tacitly determined that, so far as they were concerned, the exile should be to all intents and purposes, an exile still. Forgetting the awful commentary upon human pride that lay in the adjoining apartment, they arose together as they heard Will's voice upon the stairs, and stood — one stern, the other scornful — to meet the shameless intruder.

The door unclosed softly, and there entered, upon Will's arm, a drooping figure, her countenance so marked and seamed with sorrow, so eloquent of humble entreaty, as she beheld the mother and sisters she had deserted, that even the vain Tiny was surprised into tears. Mrs. Boylan opened her arms, and her wanderer fell within them. For some moments, the sound of low weeping filled the chamber. Then, Will, whose affectionate heart was ever yearning for the blessing denied to his otherwise happy home — the music of childish steps and baby voices — set Louise upon his wife's knee.

The little one gazed into her aunt's face, with the innocent wonder, the clear, confiding look that had characterized her mother's expression in the early days Marian remembered so

faithfully. She caught the unconscious peacemaker to her heart with a burst of emotion that swept down the walls of resentment and haughtiness at once and forever.

Maggie remained at her mother's until after the funeral. When everything was done to show respect to the dead that the living could perform, the Ainslies took their newly-regained relative to their home. She was sadly in need of such rest and nursing as Marian was ready to give. In the perfect revulsion of feeling common with persons of strong affections, united to strength of will, she was eager to efface from Maggie's mind all past unkindness by present benefits; willing to confess that she had been unjust, implacable, inhuman, as she surveyed the wreck her husband had brought back to the fold. But this Maggie would not allow. The fault had been hers — all hers — she persisted in declaring. They were only too good to receive her again. She revived rapidly, now that she was restored to an atmosphere of luxury and love.

"But I fear that her constitution is terribly shattered," said Mrs. Ainslie, to her husband, when Maggie had spent some ten days with them. "I more than suspect that wretch of a Lorraine of maltreating her. She will not say a word against him; but she acknowledged, when I questioned her, that she had not heard from him since he left, two months ago! Think of that!"

"I have thought of it, and of many other things, as bad, and worse, which it is as well you knew too," responded Will. "I have had a talk, to-day, with that Mrs. Richards, who, Maggie says, was so kind to her. Ah, Marian, we are bitterly punished for our harshness to the poor, erring child!"

"Do not say 'our!'" said his wife, generously, seeing him pause to gather self-control. "While her own father forbade the mention of her name in his presence, you begged me to see, or at least write to her, and tell her that we would befriend her,

whenever she needed help or comfort. I would not do it. I was outraged at the discovery of the systematic deception practised upon us, and ready to believe her as bad as the rest. And then, John's broken heart! But it was wrong, and it was all my doing. Now, what have you heard?"

It was a long, sad story, one with which the reader is better acquainted than was honest Mrs. Richards; but she knew enough, and had revealed sufficient to Mr. Ainslie to fill his soul with grief and indignation, and to extort from Marian exclamations of horror and anger as the recital proceeded.

"One thing is settled!" she said. "She must stay with us this winter, until her husband (how I detest to call him so!) returns."

"Then you are willing to resign her and that sweet babe to him when he chooses to claim them?" asked Will.

"Willing! not I! Still, if she wishes to go with him, how can we hinder it?"

"We cannot, if she really prefers a residence with him to the home we offer. I am much mistaken if she has any affection for him. We will not borrow trouble. He may be so enamored of Western life as never to honor us with his presence again."

"I hope so, most devoutly!" said Marian. "There is but one drawback to her living with us. What is to be done about John's visits? The dear fellow has no other home, you know."

"Let him come as he has always done!" returned Will, boldly. "No one dare speak ill of her while she is under my roof."

"That may be, yet it may not be pleasant for them to meet. When did you hear from him?"

"This morning. He will return to-morrow or next day. I merely wrote to him of your father's death, without saying anything of Maggie —"

He was interrupted by the entrance of the person last named. She held Louise by the hand ; but no sooner had that young lady espied her uncle than she left her mother, and ran to him with uplifted arms.

“ Take me, take me, Uncle Will ! ”

He obeyed, saying, as he swung her to his shoulder : “ How are mamma and Louise, to-night ? ”

“ Mamma is pretty well. Louise is hoarse, I think,” said Maggie. “ She is subject to the croup, and I am alarmed whenever she takes cold.”

“ Hoarse ! I do not notice it. Let me listen, my small lady ! ”

He laid his ear to her chest with physician-like gravity, an attention which she recognized by clutching a double handful of hair, and laughing out so clearly that Marian decided the hoarseness to be all a fancy of “ mamma’s.” Then ensued a game of romps, that lasted until dinner-time.

“ The evening is stormy,” observed Marian, as they repaired, after their meal, to the family gathering-room, the library.

“ Yes. There is every promise of an old-fashioned snow-storm,” said her husband. “ Maggie, will cigar-smoke irritate Louise’s lungs ? ”

Maggie looked up amazed. She had been so long unused to these “ small, sweet courtesies of life,” that they seemed strange to her.

“ What an idea ! ” She smiled. “ It will not hurt her, and if there were any danger, I would send her out. You should not postpone your cigar.”

“ But I would, with the greatest pleasure imaginable. What is the best weed that was ever manufactured, compared with her company ? Come to me, monkey, and mount my foot. Steady, now ! ‘ Ride a high horse to Banbury cross ! ’ ”

He was in the midst of the rhyme, and Louise shouting with

delight at her rapid flight, when, without a note of preparation, John Cleveland walked in !

He stopped short upon seeing Maggie. She was smiling at the frolic in progress, and the warmth of the room had called up a faint color into her cheeks. Seen but imperfectly as she was, in John's sudden transition from the darkness without to the brightness that surrounded her, she seemed to him the same merry, rosy girl that had made this snug retreat an Elysium for him, on his birthnight, three years before. Time sped backwards, sweeping into oblivion the sorrow that had made him old, while yet in his prime. He advanced one step and stretched out his hand to greet her. The motion dissolved the spell. As Maggie perceived him, a shadow from her mourning-dress appeared to spread over her face. She endeavored to rise, but her limbs failed her. She was literally dumb with the shame and woe of awakened memories.

The scene was inexpressibly trying to all, and when Will, in his haste to set himself with the rest at ease, presented his laughing playfellow to his bachelor friend, Marian nearly groaned aloud. "The very worst thing he could have done !"

John took the child into his arms, kissed her gently — it almost seemed, reverently — and gave her back to her uncle ; then turned to Mrs. Ainslie.

"I was grieved to hear of your loss, my dear madam. You have my sincere sympathy. How is your mother ? I feared the blow might overcome her."

While Marian replied Maggie had an opportunity to recover her confused senses, and Will leisure to prepare a series of questions that should prevent any more awkward pauses.

"I did not look for you before to-morrow night, at the earliest," he said. "How did you happen to drop in upon us, so like a visitor from cloud-land ?"

"I reached Albany a day sooner than I expected, and hur-

rying through my business there, came down in the afternoon train. I had no baggage except a carpet-bag, and when I found myself at your station, the temptation to alight and shake hands with you was too strong for my better judgment."

"You obeyed your better judgment in getting off!" said Marian, kindly. "And you have had nothing to eat since noon — have you?"

"I am not hungry —"

"But you ought to be! I will see that something is prepared directly. We have just left the table. Not another syllable! I am mistress here!"

She cut short refusals and expostulations by quitting the room.

"Who can that be!" marvelled Mr. Ainslie, as the door-bell rang furiously. "It is early for calls, and so stormy, too! Another peal! You made less noise when you arrived, John!"

"Because Katy happened to open the door to draw the mat out of the snow as I came up the steps," was the reply.

"She has grown deaf since," said Will, as a third summons made his ears tingle. "I will let in this importunate visitor myself."

He put Louise down, and went to admit the guest or messenger. A tall man, muffled in a travelling cap and cloak, stood without in the driving snow.

"Walk in, sir!" said Mr. Ainslie, with instinctive kindness. He could not have suffered a strange dog to remain in such a tempest while he had a shelter to offer him.

The man stamped and kicked his boots to rid them of the snow, holding his head down during the operation, and accepted the invitation by entering the hall. It was not until Will shut the door and turned to address his visitor again, that the latter removed his cap, and tossing back the mass of hair that overhung his brows, said roughly: "I want to see my wife, sir — Mrs. Lorraine!"

Dismayed as he was by the unwelcome apparition, Mr. Ainslie had self-possession enough to say — “If you will step in here, sir” — showing him into the front parlor — “I will inform her that you have arrived.”

Sorely perplexed, he forthwith sought his prime counsellor, his wife, who was busied in superintending John’s impromptu repast. A hasty sentence told her what had occurred, and agreeing with him that not a moment was to be lost, she left her unfinished task, and prepared to accompany him back to the library.

Lorraine, left to himself during this conjugal conference, was not disposed to wait idly. In his perturbation, Will had not thought to light the gas, and as he shut the door when he went out, the gambler sat in total darkness. The library was divided from the parlors by an arch, closed always, during the evenings, by sliding doors of stained glass. These, gayly illuminated by the chandelier and fire-light beyond them, caught Lorraine’s attention immediately. She whom he sought was probably in that family sanctum. By a single bold manœuvre he could upset whatever nonsensical designs her relatives might have of preparing her to receive him, according to their ideas of his demerits. It was all very dignified and proper to leave him here in the dark, while they instructed her in her lesson, but he would show them that he was not to be trifled with in that style. He crept softly to the lighted doors and tried to hear what was going on in the other room. All was still. The truth was, that John and Maggie would have esteemed almost any interruption, save the one that now menaced them, a welcome relief from the embarrassment of their present position. Neither had spoken since they were thoughtlessly left together, and Maggie doubted her ability to accomplish the retreat she longed to attempt. Louise stood leaning on her mother’s lap, her great, brown eyes riveted upon the strange

gentleman — their solemn stare adding to his uncomfortable sensations.

Lorraine pushed one of the sliding leaves back, cautiously and without noise, so that it left a narrow crack in his screen, and listened again.

"Is she a healthy child? She looks delicate," said a voice, that, constrained as it was, sent a thrill through the whole body of the jealous eavesdropper.

"Yes — that is — she is quite well, thank you!" answered Maggie, hurriedly. "Louise, daughter! bid Mr. —, the gentleman, 'good-night.' It is time for you to go up stairs."

As Mr. and Mrs. Ainslie made their appearance from the hall, the inner doors were shoved rudely back, and Lorraine confronted his wife and Mr. Cleveland, who had arisen simultaneously at the crash. One glimpse of his fierce, dark face caused Marian to throw herself before her sister and the child, while Will advanced to his friend's side.

"And this is why I was told to wait until you, my fine lady, were informed that I was here!" commenced Lorraine, choking with rage. "Your gallant was to have a chance to clear out before I caught sight of him!"

"Marian!" said Will, authoritatively, "take Maggie and the child out of this room!"

"Stir, if you dare!" vociferated Lorraine to his wife. "I came for you and your brat, and" — with a horrid oath — "I mean to have you, alive or dead. I'll show you who your master is! I'll teach you to play these tricks while I am away!"

"Be quiet, John!" Mr. Ainslie held back his partner. "He is her husband, and as such, entitled to an explanation, it matters not in what terms he may choose to demand it. You may not be aware, Mr. Lorraine, of Mr. Boylan's death. Mrs. Lorraine was sent for to attend his funeral."

"As if I didn't know all that! What else brought me

East in such a hurry, but seeing the notice of the old man's death in the papers? And, no sooner do I reach New York, than I hear that the stingy old curmudgeon never mentioned his youngest daughter's name in his will, and that she, forsooth, is staying up the river at her brother-in-law's, licking the boots of the people who have cheated her out of her just rights! And then"—his countenance gathering malignity, as he proceeded—"I find her holding a private conversation with this"—Here followed a string of opprobrious epithets.

"Marian, ring that bell!" ordered Will, struggling to appear calm. "If you utter another word such as those that have just insulted these ladies, sir, I will order in my gardener and have you put out of the house. Every syllable was a falsehood, and you know it!"

In a second the bully had drawn a revolver and levelled it at Mr. Ainslie's head; the next, Maggie rushed frantically forward and caught the barrel of the weapon. It was a frightful risk, but the finger that held the trigger was unnerved by liquor and passion, and the action of his wife's lost him his hold. Before he could regain it, John tore the pistol from him, and the gardener, a burly Irishman, who had run up-stairs at the imperative ring, took an unauthorized share in the affray by approaching the belligerent in the rear, and passing his muscular arms around Lorraine's, pinioned him tightly. The women-servants likewise came to their mistress's assistance, and while one carried Louise from the room, the other aided Mr. Ainslie to lift Maggie from the floor. Marian had broken her fall, but she lay in strong hysterical convulsions. Lorraine ceased his efforts to liberate himself, as they carried her past him. He followed her with a half-terrified, fascinated gaze, until she was lost to his sight, and stood passive in the embrace of his captor, silent if not cowed. The evil spark glowed again in his sullen eyes, when Mr. Ainslie reappeared.

"You have treated me very hospitably to-night, sir," he said, scornfully; "in quite a brotherly manner, I may say. It is no more than I should have expected from you two gentlemen, and I sha'n't forget it in a hurry. Three against one is very fair odds in your code of honor."

"Michael, let him go!" commanded Will.

The gardener obeyed, but remained conveniently near his late prisoner.

"I have but one question more to ask you," pursued Lorraine. "Am I to have my wife and child peaceably, or shall I go to law for them?"

"You cannot have them to-night, assuredly. Neither of them is fit to go out in this weather. Whether you ever regain possession of them will depend upon the success that Mrs. Lorraine's friends have in inducing her to apply for a divorce. Such an application will not be denied by any court in the land."

"You are very candid!" sneered Lorraine. "When I have had my say before that same court, I flatter myself that it will grant me a divorce from her, whatever may be the verdict in her case. There is justice for husbands as well as wives!"

"If you make another such insinuation, I will throw you out of the window!" Will's temper had gained the ascendancy at last. "Go to law as soon as you like, and see what you can do! For I declare to you, that sooner than resign to you the two unfortunate creatures who are now, thank Heaven! under my protection, I would shoot you with as little compunction as I would a mad dog. I had rather trust a woman and child in a tiger's den than with you. Michael, wait upon the gentleman down to the depot. Don't lose sight of him until you see him off for the city!"

"All right, sir!"

Lorraine was beginning to feel dull from the reaction of the

fiery draughts he had swallowed, both in New York and in the village below. He offered no objection, beyond a growled curse, to his proposed escort, and wheeled heavily to leave the room.

"My pistol!" he said, thickly, to John, who still held it.

"I shall keep it, for the present!" was the brief rejoinder.

"As you like! I suppose another will send you to perdition quite as well!"

These were his parting words. After they set off, Will heard from the gate Michael's friendly admonition: "Be aisy, now! Shure, can't ye fale that there's no fight left in ye? and isn't a sober man a match for two dhrunken ones, any day?"

Clement Lorraine was as cautious as his brother was reckless; avaricious of gain as he was extravagant; moral in the eyes of the community as he was profligate; diligent in business, as Albert was indolent. It was not surprising, then, that his sleigh should be the first vehicle that broke the snow in the avenue leading from Mrs. Dupont's mansion, on the morning succeeding the opening storm of the season. His wife was on a visit to her mother, and although he grumbled in a smothered tone, which was all he ventured to do in Marie's hearing, when he thought of the cold, slow ride to the depot, he never thought of shirking it. That way business lay — and after fortifying himself by a hot and hearty breakfast, he stepped into the nest of fur robes provided for him, and bade the driver "hurry on, or he might lose the train."

The snow was deep, but they made tolerable speed, and were descending the last and steepest hill on the route, when one of the horses stumbled slightly over what looked like a drift in the road, and as the sleigh struck the same, the rider experienced an uncomfortable jolt. He looked back naturally to ascertain the cause, and there, just apparent above the trampled snow,

probably tossed up by the horse's hoof, was a human hand ! In less time than it takes me to relate it, the two men had dug out, into plain view, a stark and ghastly corpse ; the features, so lately inflamed by anger and intemperance, frozen into marble whiteness, and the open eyes staring blankly into his brother's face !

The tale of his wanderings, after the faithful Michael had seen him upon "a down train," was easily surmised. He had left the cars at the next station, with the design of going up to Mrs. Dupont's, whether because he knew that his brother was there and hoped to gain something by an appeal to him, or from some cloudy impression that he would be welcomed in his old haunts, could not be known. In his condition, the sequel was inevitable, unless he were rescued by some passing traveller, and the fury of the night kept sane people at home. As fools live, he had lived ; as fools die, he died. The shuddering hand of charity draws a veil over the dread awaking that succeeded to the deep, fatal slumber in that snowy bed.

News of the event was dispatched to the wife of the deceased, but he had lain in his grave three weeks before she received the message. As might have been foreseen, the shock of her husband's appearance and conduct on that terrible night, was too great for one in her delicate state of health. During many days of suffering, fever, and delirium, Marian watched, and Mrs. Boylan wept by her bedside, expecting that each hour would be her last. Excellent nursing and medical skill, rather than strength of constitution, won back the fluttering life. When she again moved through the house, the mere ghost of her former self, a widow's cap shaded her young forehead, and a little mound, beside the resting-place of the unhappy father, covered the babe whose first painful breath of mortal life was also its last.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAGGIE lived for two years with her mother ; the companion, nurse, comforter of her declining years, while Tiny, who had awaited impatiently the close of the conventional twelve-month of seclusion, again flitted through the gay world, a pitiful caricature of juvenility, with false roses blooming where she used to say the natural ones never flourished ; false hair wreathing her restless head, and false smiles contending hopelessly with real querulousness for the mastery in her expression. Her devotion to the society that had so poorly requited her lavish expenditure of time and pains, by persistently denying her life's chief end—a husband ; her many absences from home and selfish engrossment in her own concerns when there, were the principal causes of her amazement at the tidings communicated to her by Marian, one day, in the third year of Maggie's widowhood. Her indignation and ill-dissembled chagrin had their source in emotions thoroughly comprehended by herself alone. Even Marian, who knew her failings so well, was surprised at the energy of her disapproval.

“ It is perfectly shameful ! really outrageous ! ” she protested vehemently. “ All second marriages are abominable, and ought to be prohibited by law ; but I *should* have thought that Maggie's matrimonial scrapes had created enough talk in their day without her setting the public all agog again, by this piece of impropriety. That is the way with all these so-called amiable people. They are shallow-hearted — every one of them — and

fickle as the wind. She might wait until her weeds are fairly worn out. And after risking and losing everything for the sake of marrying her first husband! I never heard the equal of this in my life — never!”

Marian had greatly improved since the beginning of our acquaintance with her. If Maggie had gained strength and wisdom from her trials, the sorrows that had fallen more lightly upon her married sister had rendered her less caustic and more forbearing with the foibles and errors of others. She would, still, when Tiny became intolerable — particularly if Maggie were her victim — leave the quiet walks of argumentative persuasion, and encounter her upon her own ground, although with weapons of sharper edge and finer polish; but to-day, her mood was pacific. She had brought to the interview a goodly stock of patience, and there were softening emotions at work in her bosom, aroused by the event she had engaged to announce, that kept down any disposition to retort angrily upon Tiny's tirade.

“You forget, Tiny, that Mr. Lorraine was never the man of Maggie's unbiassed choice. Marie Dupont made the match, and hurried the poor girl on to her destruction so insidiously, that she had no time to reflect upon or realize her real position, until it was too late. I have often thought, with grief and remorse, of our want of watchfulness over her inexperience; how cruelly negligent we were in leaving her so much to the influence of associates we knew to be doubtful — if nothing worse.”

“I don't blame myself! Not one bit! She had twice the care that *I* ever had.”

“And a hundred temptations where you had one,” thought Marian. “I believe,” she said, aloud, “that if she had been allowed to follow the promptings of her own heart, she would have preferred Mr. Cleveland to Lorraine, up to the moment of her marriage.”

"Pretty morality, that, in your pattern saint!" interrupted Tiny.

Marian favored her with a steady gaze fully two minutes long, and went on.

"As to the impropriety of her accepting him now, and the scandal of a spiteful world, the most malicious can say no more of them than is said every day of other second marriages. The character of both parties is above reproach. Nothing except the meanest envy can find occasion for sneers in the contemplated union, and the pure and good always rise superior to such attacks."

"I don't see how she can have the face to accept him, when he knows all the circumstances of the life she led in New York, and what a brute that Lorraine was!"

"He loves her the better for every sorrow she has borne. Your remark shows how little you know of John's real character," said Marian, her eye kindling with enthusiasm. "I wonder, and so does Maggie, that his affection should have survived the knowledge of her insincerity towards him, and her clandestine marriage, convinced though he was that she was the tool of others. Maggie has told me, in her sweet, beautiful humility, how unworthy she felt herself to be of this magnanimity, this undying love. John and I had a long, frank talk about this, last night. He recognizes and appreciates the ennobling and purifying effect of her afflictions upon her; a lustre which, he says, throws a gleam over the memory of the darkest, saddest passages of her life. He denies, indignantly, that there is anything meritorious in his constancy. He never loved any other woman, he declares, and from the first hour of their meeting, it has seemed as natural to love her as to breathe."

Tiny was standing at the window, drumming a quick tattoo

on the sill. Marian, absorbed in her subject, did not think of or care for the sympathy of her auditor.

"Dear little Louise!" she continued. "How happy she will be! She has never known what a father's care is. Will is crazy to adopt her, but John will not hear of it. Did I ever tell you, Tiny, the pretty little incident which Maggie repeated to me, about John's chancing to see her walking one day with Louise, during that lonely, struggling winter? Maggie did not observe him, but he was near enough to notice how beautiful the child was, and how worn and thin her cloak looked: So, the great-hearted fellow —"

But Tiny had bounced out of the room, and her heels were clattering up the stairs to her chamber, where the false roses were soon washed out by real tears of disappointment and mortification. With the tenacity of spinsterly desperation, she had hoped to the last, and the last had now come.

Incredible as it may appear to those not versed in the edifying exhibitions of forgiveness and forgetfulness that may be witnessed every day in polite circles, when a change of fortune has altered the position of the offending party, among the first cards left for Mrs. Cleveland were those of Mr. and Mrs. Clement Lorraine. And Maggie periled her reputation for the Christian graces, in which every fashionable dame should be a proficient, by never returning the call, or inviting the Lorraines to her parties — a shocking breach of decorum, accounted for by Mrs. Clement to her friends, with a melancholy and resigned air — "Ah! my dear! the ingratitude of some persons is enough to embitter one against the whole human race!"

Mrs. Boylan resided with the Cleverlands until her death. She lived to see two other golden heads cluster, with Louise, around her knees, while a chorus of infant tongues called off her eyes from the last novel, by importunities for nursery-ballads and sugar plums. Of these, her memory and her capa-

cious pocket were unfailing reservoirs, and very cheerfully did both surrender their riches. An inefficient mother often makes a popular granddame, and Maggie's children loved theirs as the gentlest, most indulgent of baby-spoilers.

Tiny grew younger every year. Her share of her father's estate, although not a fortune, was near enough to one to invite the closer inspection of a money-loving swain, whose principal matrimonial disadvantages were, first, his youth, he being ten years the junior of his inamorata; secondly, his poverty, inasmuch as he was only a clerk in a retail dry goods store; thirdly, fourthly, and fifthly, his paucity of good looks, intelligence, and breeding. But Tiny could not afford, at this late date, to be fastidious. She caught him, like a gudgeon, as he was, at the sea-side; brought him home at her chariot-wheels, and married him in six weeks thereafter. He has proved himself the master of one art, that of saving money, and of another—a rarer accomplishment—that of carrying his point against a scolding wife, by sheer doggedness of purpose and obstinate silence. Tiny stays at home and minds the house, while he is abroad adding dollar by dollar to his hoards. He will be a rich man in twenty years, say, his friends, and then his sexagenarian spouse may begin “to enjoy life.”

LEAH MOORE'S TRIAL.

CHAPTER I.

IN writing the history of the married life of my very dear and lamented friend, Leah Moore, I am moved, I trust, by no revengeful spirit towards the authors of her unhappiness ; still less am I actuated by any delusory hope that word or lesson of mine, be it conveyed directly, or under the guise of fiction, may succeed in exciting contrition in the bosom of the principal agent in the evil work it is my task to portray. I would do simple justice to one of the noblest hearts that ever loved and suffered wrong through that love — justice denied her by society and her own household, and which I alone, of all living who knew her, can fully set forth. Nor, I may say here, would I ever have lifted my pen to the mournful undertaking had not Rumor, cruelly regardless of the sanctity of the grave, been busy with the name and story of her who has passed beyond reach of its attacks. Yet the tale has its moral, and may not be spoken altogether in vain to some thoughtlessly-sinuing lover of admiration ; some not quite wanton trifler with another's happiness.

It was not thought strange that Leah and I were intimate associates and friends at school, although I was in my seventeenth, when she reached her fourteenth year. Nobody called her a child, even then. She was tall for her age, with a womanly air, equally removed from formality and forward-

ness; a diligent student, an exemplary pupil in deportment, and, as I can best testify, a deep-hearted friend. The eldest of four children — her mother's confirmed ill health had early cast upon the devoted daughter duties and responsibilities that would have been deemed onerous by many of twice her years, and to this circumstance she probably owed her early maturity of mind and manner. She was considered and described by most people as prompt in judgment and self-reliant in an unusual degree. The few who studied her more thoroughly, and arrived at a just conception of her character — and the number of these was indeed small — discovered, to their surprise, that she possessed neither of these qualities, detected a diffidence with regard to her own opinions, a trembling sensitiveness to the sentiments and tastes of those she esteemed and loved, seemingly at variance with her apparently ready decisions and resolute action. She was strong-minded, without being conceited or wedded to her conclusions; independent, without a tincture of arrogance. It is not the most tender hearts — those whose structure is most exquisite and delicate — that are, in popular parlance, "worn upon the sleeve." The tulip and rose, dahlia and hollyhock flaunt, expand, and glow upon the outer border of the parterre, and invite the look and touch of passers-by. The violet and anemone seek seclusion and shade. To her father, Leah was a companion and co-adviser; to her sister and brothers, a judicious guardian and tender nurse, whose steady, active kindness won for her both respect and affection; but the invalid mother alone fathomed and appreciated the wealth and passionate earnestness of her innermost nature.

A year after I left school for my own home and friends, I received a letter from Leah, imparting the not-unexpected intelligence of this parent's death. The epistle was brief, and in some sort calm. There were no hackneyed phrases of res-

ignation — it would have been unlike her to employ such ; no declamatory bursts of grief or professions of inconsolable anguish — only one sentence, over which the hand had faltered — one which, coming from most women, would have meant little more than met the eye — that yet gave me a glimpse into the sorrowful depths of the veiled heart.

“I cannot trust myself to attempt to tell even you, Maria, of my unutterable loneliness. Pray for me, that my strength fail not.”

Strength ! That was her first, her abiding thought ! strength, to be expended for others' good !

I paid her a visit the ensuing winter, and found her serene, busy, outwardly cheerful ; the nominal, as she had been so long the virtual mistress and controller of her father's establishment. In private, and to me, she was the stricken bird, pining ceaselessly for the warmth and shelter of the parent wing. Then passed six years, in which neither of us looked upon the other's face. To her they brought many and various cares ; the employments incident upon her position as a housewife and a daughter ; the claims of society ; the occasional anxieties of sickness among the different members of her family — of all these her letters to me treated ; none of them great or startling events, yet, all combined, sufficing to keep her from the fulfilment of a long-cherished, oft-attempted scheme of visiting me. To myself, the same cycles were crowded with fate ; bore in their bosom orphanage, and another bereavement, whose shadow lay deeper and darker than the deaths of father and mother — selfish griefs, with which this narrative has nothing to do.

At last after an infinite deal of hope deferred and frustrated endeavor, Leah came to me. She was a tall, finely-proportioned woman of two-and-twenty, with noble, thoughtful features ; a countenance that kindled into rare and sudden brightness in

animated speech, and took, in converse with such as she liked and loved, a winning gentleness, indescribably fascinating, that suited well the softened, sweeter modulations of her voice. She speedily made herself popular in our quiet inland town, and in the dwelling, now inhabited only by my widower brother and myself, the remnant of a numerous and happy household, she was a perpetual solace and delight.

"You have grown younger, instead of older, with the passage of time, Leah — more joyous, rather than graver," I remarked one night, as we sat over our chamber fire, after our return from a small evening party, given expressly in her honor. "I wish I dared repeat to your ears some of the many compliments to your 'engaging affability,' your 'ready wit,' and general brilliancy, which were confided to me by rapturous admirers at Mrs. Townes'."

"Do you intimate that the chrysalis of school days has become a butterfly?" she asked, coloring, yet with a brighter smile.

"Or that the bird of Paradise has unfolded her wings?" returned I, in a like strain. "One would say that you had found the Fountain of Life and Perpetual Youth, and drunk copiously therefrom."

"I have!"

Her look was too earnest now for smiles, yet her face grew more radiant; her eyes overflowed with gladness. I gazed at her in dumb amaze, too stupid to read at once her meaning.

"Here is the token that I have tasted — drunk abundantly of it!" She raised her hand, upon the third finger of which sparkled a diamond, as it were a crystallized drop of spray from the fabled fount. "I have longed to tell you all about it ever since I have been with you. Will you let me do it now?"

She sprang up; extinguished the light, and, sinking upon

the cushion at my feet, wound her arms about my waist, and in low, hesitating accents, that soon became full and melodious, revealed the precious secret. I had heard the name and something of the character and standing of her betrothed before she mentioned him, but never from her lips or in connection with herself. Charles Moore was a young lawyer of talent and enterprise, for several years past a resident of her native place. His fine abilities in his profession, his personal attractions and social qualities had been favorably spoken of in my presence by more than one acquaintance of his and my own, and I was thus prepared for her description of the means by which he had won her. I took verbal exception to but a single item of her portraiture.

"He is very unlike me!" she said, laughingly. "But I cannot say that I consider that an imperfection."

"*I* do," rejoined I, bluntly. "What constitutes this dissimilarity — may I ask?"

"You will change your mind when you hear. He is as sanguine of temperament as I am desponding; charitable in judgment where I would be censorious; gentle and forbearing when I would, in like circumstances, be captious and severe with my best friends; frank and enthusiastic, while I am reserved and calculating. Ah, Maria! when you see and know him, you will acknowledge what I confess hourly to myself — that he is far too good and noble for poor faulty me; will wonder with me at the strange taste — the only instance of bad taste I ever observed in him by the way — that beguiled him into selecting me as his lifelong companion."

"Never! were he the immaculate conception of all the virtues and graces you have enumerated!" I asserted, obstinately.

She shook her head, with a confident smile. "Again I say, only wait and see! I am striving to adapt myself to his

wishes — to what I know he would like, although he has never suggested, however remotely, a criticism of what I now am — ”

“ I should think not, indeed ! ” interrupted I, impatient of this uncalled-for humility, which, I could yet see, was unfeigned. “ I should dislike him on the spot, withhold my consent, which, of course, is indispensable to the consummation of the contract, were he to attempt any such remoulding process.”

“ There is no danger ! He is as blind to my imperfections as another too partial friend, not a hundred miles away ; generosity that incites me to renewed watchfulness and endeavor after conformity to the right standard. I am conscious of my deficiencies, although he may be ignorant of them. God knows how constant and fervent is my prayer that I may make him as happy as he deserves to be. If the power is denied me, I shall find death very sweet ! ”

It was unfair, while it was not perhaps unnatural, that I should from this conversation conceive a faint and secret prejudice against the much-lauded lover, which the encomiums of his *fiancée* could not remove. My impulses were strong, my conclusions quickly established to my own satisfaction, and, as may be supposed, I often erred in both. Leah was my dearest friend ; and, if not absolutely faultless in my eyes, occupied too lofty a stand in my regard, was too far superior to the ordinary run of women, for me to entertain, with tolerance, the thought of this stranger, who, I doubted not, had fifty foibles to her one, suggesting amendments in disposition and manner : remodelling, where he should have rendered only delighted approval. I said nothing of this discontent, however, while she went on with the details of their present plans and painted their hopeful Future. Her sister, Pauline, two years her junior, was to be married at the same time with herself to a gentleman from the far West. The brothers, now almost young

men, were in college, and the father was to reside with Leah and her husband.

"It is a sunny picture!" she said, musingly. "Indeed, Maria"—lifting her face, whose expression of perfect trust and happiness I could discern even in the uncertain fire-light—"my love has been cloudless from its dawn until now. We have had no rough seas, no storms. It is all sunshine."

Was it for me to cast a shadow of doubt or misgiving upon the heaven of this joyous confidence—this blissful serenity of love which comes to so few souls, unshadowed by sad memories or sadder forebodings? I hoped with and prayed for her.

The marriage took place at the appointed time, and I went, summoned by the bride, to pass the fortnight preceding the ceremony with her. Upon the evening of my arrival I was presented to the bridegroom expectant. Despite my preconceived intention to criticize narrowly, and, if needful, condemn unsparingly, he conquered prejudice and disarmed censure in the course of a single interview. He was a fine-looking fellow, six feet tall, with black hair and eyes; his physiognomy indicative at once of intellect and amiability, and his frank, courteous bearing bespoke him, in heart as in demeanor, the thoroughbred gentleman. But his principal passport to my favor was not in these external advantages, or in the flattering interest he exhibited in myself. It consisted in his silent yet expressive devotion to the object of his heart's choice; his unobtrusive watchfulness of her every motion; the respectful attention lent to her slightest word; his manifest pride in, and admiration of her.

"I like him! fully as much as you can desire!" was my report to Leah when she came to my room after his departure, anxious to gather my impressions of the hero of her drama. "My mind is quite at rest since I have seen you together. He is one in a thousand, for he appreciates you."

"Overrates, you should say ! My great fear is lest he should awake some day."

Which fear had no place in my visions of their united lives.

I was her first bridesmaid ; gave her up to him — not gladly ; I was not heroine enough for that — still without an envious murmur at his happiness for a prophetic thought of evil for her. Providence — so said the horoscope cast for her by my loving imagination — had decreed to her a lot rich in life's choicest blessings. So far as mortal could judge, she deserved the gift, and I felt assured would make right use of it. Our correspondence was continued regularly after her marriage — an instance of friendship's fidelity that would have surprised me in any other of my whilome school-fellows — which was so in keeping with Leah's character and conduct, that it awoke no wonderment. Now and then her letters had, as an appendix, a note from Mr. Moore, often lively, always kind. He seemed to desire me to understand how heartily he indorsed our intimacy, and certainly succeeded, by so doing, in showing me how fully he entered into all that gave his wife pleasure. They had been married but half a year when there came a black-sealed letter, not only superscribed, but written wholly by him, informing me of the death of Leah's father.

I was not wounded that she had not herself communicated with me as at her mother's decease, which was, from the very nature of her circumstances at that period, and the peculiar affection existing between parent and child, a heavier stroke than this ; understood and admitted the excuse her husband made for her silence, namely, that she was too "much overcome by her grief to undertake even this trifling exertion." There existed no longer the necessity for stern self-control, for resolute calmness and vigorous action that had nerved her upon the former occasion. Sorrowful she might be and doubtless was,

but lonely-hearted and self-dependent no more. There is sweetness in the woe that is wept out upon a stronger and a sympathizing heart. It is solitary and unshared anguish that blights and kills. Leah's womanhood grew richer and fuller beneath the cloud. True, I could only trace the change by means of her letters, but these were frequent and long, and with her, the pen was a more ready and eloquent vehicle of thought and feeling than the tongue.

Two more years went swiftly by, and by the mysterious sort of fatality that had already kept us so often asunder, when we earnestly desired and persistently sought the society of one another, we had not met for a single hour. As the third winter of her wedded life approached, she redoubled her solicitations for my company, and making an extraordinary effort, I conquered fate itself, and set out upon the long-contemplated trip. The distance was not formidable, the route direct, and I encountered no difficulties by the way. It was a raw, disagreeable afternoon, threatening an easterly storm, when I found myself near my journey's end, and my musings, insensibly to myself, at first, took the hue of the sky and atmosphere. I dwelt perversely, and especially upon the idea that Leah's part of our correspondence had not of late been sustained with her accustomed spirit. The intervals of silence had been of greater length, her communications shorter, and, I fancied, less free and candid than of yore. There was no diminution of regard for me implied by these alterations. Of this I was assured in so many words by herself, and I rested implicitly upon her assertion. She had never expressed herself more warmly with respect to this point than in her latest epistle, an answer to mine settling the time of my arrival. Her health would not allow her to go much into society this winter, she wrote; her husband's increasing practice frequently called him away from home for several days together. I could and would do

her good by coming; she *longed* for me, and could not brook further disappointment.

"I had not supposed that any amount of bodily weakness could make her nervous or low-spirited," I said to myself, in ruminating upon these signs of the times. "And if it has, Mr. Moore's temperament better fits him to become a restorative than does mine. It is gratifying to one's vanity to be thus importuned; but I hope Leah does not pine for me while he is" at home. He is grievously in fault if she does."

A sombre meditation upon man's waywardness and selfish absorption in worldly cares and business profits was seasonably interrupted by our stopping at the depot, in the busy and thriving town which was the terminus of the railway.

My foot had barely touched the platform when my hands were seized in a fervent grasp; Leah's voice was bidding me a joyous welcome, and Leah's face — the dear, old familiar features and smile — was looking full into mine. Gloom and saddening fancies fled apace at sound and sight of these. Flushed and eager, she drew me out of the noisy crowd towards a pretty, stylish carriage standing near, seated me therein, demanded my checks, and sent them off by the servant before I could utter more than a word of greeting. It was this never-failing presence of mind — this energetic mode of action that gained for her the reputation of coolness and independence. To me it was very delightful, for it was characteristic of her, and her alone. My first connected sentence was one of expostulation.

"You should not have come out this damp evening. I could have found my way to your house without subjecting you to this needless risk."

"As if I would allow that! Charles is not in town; he is off upon one of his stupid court circuits, or he would have robbed me of the pleasure of meeting you. As to risk, that is

all nonsense. There is nothing in such weather as this that can harm a well person, and to-day I am in unusually fine spirits and health."

She looked well and bright. I noticed this more particularly when she came to my room to see if I needed any assistance in making my toilet for the evening. I was already dressed, and there was still half an hour to spare before tea-time. She had laid aside her hat and cloak; her eyes were full of happy light; her cheeks almost rosy. I was half angry at and quite ashamed of my ridiculous imaginings concerning her unhappiness.

"This," she said, unclosing the door of an apartment that adjoined mine upon one side, and her chamber on the other, "is my 'snuggery' — our family sitting-room. When I have stranger guests, it is my custom to keep this door of communication locked. You will always be welcome in the sanctum. We shall have many long delicious talks together here, morning, noon, and night. I have hoped for them hungrily! This is your chair. It has been ready for you — yawning vacantly to receive you for two months, you naughty girl! Try it!"

She forced me gently down into a low lounging-chair beside the cheerful fire, and took another close by for herself. I pronounced the elastic cushions only too luxurious, and thanked her for this proof of kindly affection.

"I need not ask who is the proprietor of that!" I continued, pointing to a larger and taller *fauteuil* shrouded in gray linen.

"It is Charles' especial resting-place. No one sits in it while he is away, and it is never covered when he is in town. I worked it myself, and would have done the upholstering, if I had known how." She removed the cover and displayed the rich and elaborate embroidery of the seat, arms, and back. "The footstool matches it, you perceive."

"And you can find time for fancy-work amid all your seri-

ous duties!" I exclaimed. "It must have taken months to complete that."

"It consumed only the spare moments of a few weeks — scraps of leisure that would otherwise have been wasted. I should have felt amply compensated for years of labor by the sight of Charles' surprise and pleasure at the unexpected gift. I have enjoyed few happier moments than those I tasted upon the Christmas evening — a stormy one — when, arrayed in the dressing-gown and slippers that accompanied the chair, he first ensconced himself within its friendly embrace, lighted his cigar, and entered upon a genuine old-fashioned fireside chat. He is eminently domestic in his tastes, appreciates these 'small, sweet courtesies' of home-life, and is so grateful for each and all of them that I would be very unkind were I to omit them. And while we are speaking of him" — as if her tongue were liable to wander to any other theme! "while we are speaking of him, I must not forget to deliver his message to you." She drew a letter from her pocket, handling it very carefully — one would have said tenderly. "I only received this to-day. It is not so long as are mine to him; but its superiority in quality overbalances that shortcoming. He is engaged in an important and tedious suit in L——, and has not a minute that he can call his own. This was dashed off in the court-room. Poor fellow! but he knew how anxious and disappointed I would be if he did not write. He says: 'I shall think of you and Maria on Wednesday night; shall sympathize with my whole heart in your happiness at the reunion with your old and tried friend. Tell her how sincerely I regret my inability to join with you in her reception, and how great will be my pleasure at meeting her at last in our own home. Do not be so well satisfied with her society as to anticipate my arrival on Thursday, with distaste.' The rest you would not care to hear." She broke off, laughing and blushing.

"You would not care to read aloud, you mean! He would not have written that last saucy sentence, had he not felt very sure how unnecessary was the caution. You are a happy woman, Leah, in having your husband in love with you so long after the wedding-day!"

Was it another of my absurd fancies, or did a slight spasm of pain shoot across her features — her eye grow momentarily dim? Whatever it was, it was gone in a second.

"You are right! The lines of my life have fallen in pleasant places. My joys are real and abiding — my sorrows, the phantoms of my undisciplined imagination. I shame to own it, Maria, but I am wickedly unreasonable, foolishly exacting at times, even with Charles. I am trying to overcome this unworthy propensity; and to bear in mind that every man in his position and with his temperament, has other claimants upon his time and thoughts besides his wife, let her be ever so dear. It is one of my failings that I want to be everything or nothing to him!"

"The wife of a distinguished literary man, who was a most affectionate husband withal, once confessed to me that, during the twenty years of her otherwise happy married life, she had been at some seasons the victim of violent and angry jealousy. Her rival was one not easily gotten rid of, and seductive as obstinate. It was her husband's library," was my response.

"Good! I must tell that to Charles! He has a sort of study — a 'den,' he calls it — in the third story, where even I am not welcome at certain hours. I sometimes fairly detest the tobacco-scented, book-littered place. He always reminds me of Robinson Crusoe and his inner cave, when he withdraws to this retreat. I tell him that he would pull the staircase up after him if he could, as Robinson used to do his ladder, so great is his dread of intruders."

Just then I heard the sound of the piano from the parlors

below, a fashionable variation of a popular air, well and boldly played.

"You have company, then?" I said.

Leah looked annoyed, although she tried not to let this appear.

"Only Janetta Dalrymple — a cousin of Mr. Moore's, who is passing the winter here."

"You have not mentioned her in your letters, I think."

She paid no attention to the remark.

"She has been with us nearly three months. Her mother died a year and a half ago, and her father was married again in six months to a young, giddy girl. Janetta's home being thus rendered exceedingly unpleasant, after a great deal of uncomfortable feeling upon both sides, she left it and went to live with her married brother. *His* wife died last September, and he went abroad almost immediately, committing Janetta to our care until he should return. The brother and sister are the only children of Charles' favorite cousin — a lady who was a second mother to him in his boyhood, and he is naturally desirous to testify his grateful recollection of her kindness by doing all that lies in his power to serve the surviving members of her family. Have you observed that portrait?"

It was an excellent likeness of her father, hung upon the opposite wall over against my chair. I arose to examine it, and, if she desired to prevent further inquiries respecting her husband's relatives, her end was gained. I did not give Miss Dalrymple another remark or thought until we met at the tea-table.

She was shorter than Leah, reaching scarcely to the shoulder of the latter; plump and fair-skinned, neither pretty nor yet plain; an unremarkable-looking girl at first sight, and dressed rather carelessly in deep mourning. She said little while we were at supper, merely replying to the ordinary courtesies of

the meal, but it was evidently the taciturnity of indolence or nonchalance, not of diffidence. Indeed the impression left upon my mind by her countenance and demeanor was that of very cool self-satisfaction and self-possession, diametrically opposed to anything like timid or bashful reserve. I conceived the notion then that she could talk well and fluently, if she considered it worth her while to make the exertion.

Upon leaving the supper-room, Leah addressed her more politely than cordially. "It is raining so heavily that we shall hardly be interrupted by company this evening. Miss Allison and myself will spend it in the sitting-room up stairs. Will you join us?"

"No, I thank you, Cousin Leah! This wet night is a genuine godsend to me. I shall practise steadily until bed-time. I am ashamed to say that I have not learned nearly all the new music which Cousin Charles kindly gave me to cheer my lonely hours while he should be away. He will think me sadly ungrateful, will scold me roundly, I am afraid."

Leah bit her lip and led the way up stairs. We were hardly seated when the piano broke out into brilliant music. With a movement like a shiver of petulance or disgust, Leah rang the bell.

"Catherine!" she ordered the servant who answered it, "go down and close the parlor doors softly, so as not to disturb Miss Dalrymple. Do it without attracting her attention, if you can."

The girl performed her errand faithfully, for the music, muffled by the closed doors, poured on in a continuous stream, as though the performer had neither stirred nor looked away from her notes.

"Now, we can talk in something like comfort!" Leah ejaculated, drawing her chair nearer to me and the fire.

She had never been more than a tolerable musician, neither

her ear nor her touch being very good ; but I knew that since her marriage she had striven to cultivate her taste and increase her skill in the accomplishment to please her husband, who was a passionate lover of the art, and devoted to its practice. Ignorant that I was trenching upon a delicate subject, I said :

“Have you paid much attention to music lately? You should be a proficient by this time, having proved yourself to be an exception in this respect, as in the matter of embroidery, to the generality of married ladies. Both occupations are with you a labor of love — both pursued with an object.”

“I rarely play now,” she rejoined, gravely. “I am not strong enough to attempt very diligent practice. Janetta is a better performer than I, and I have given this part of Charles’ entertainment over to her.”

If practice makes perfect, Miss Dalrymple might well be the unrivalled mistress of the finger-board. We talked until the small hours wore in upon the midnight, and she played all the while, with no more interruption than was necessary in laying down one piece of music and taking up another. I ceased to marvel at Leah’s nervousness at the commencement of the performance. If this were the order of exercises to be observed upon every rainy evening, I should certainly put up my petitions for a dry winter.

CHAPTER II.

MR. MOORE was expected home in the evening train, on the day succeeding my arrival, and long before the hour of his coming the house wore a holiday aspect. It was hard to define the precise features of the change that had come over the premises, for all had been neat, and fresh, and tasteful before. Leah was a model housewife, taking great pride and pleasure in all that appertained to this office, and as she passed from room to room, rearranging furniture, polishing a glass here, and adding a flower, or other trifling decoration there, she appeared to scatter light and bloom from her own countenance; sung at her work as blithely as any bird. Dusk found her in the handsomely furnished parlors, illuminated as for a host of visitors.

“Charles has a horror of gloomy rooms!” she explained, as she kindled another burner in the chandelier. “He is too cheerful himself to like darkness or an uncertain light.”

She had laid off mourning for her father. “Charles never liked to see her wear black; it was too sombre for her complexion.” Her dress to-night was one which, she proudly informed me, was his choice and gift, a bronze-colored silk, heavy yet soft in texture, and relieved at throat and wrists by crimson velvet ribbons. The laces of her collar and undersleeves were daintily fine; her headdress, lappets of black lace, “picked out” — to use a technical term — with crimson in the crown-piece, became her admirably. She looked and moved the dignified, comely matron, the happy wife. Again and again her watch

was consulted as the important hour drew on — impatience that, it was evident, would grow into uneasiness if the train were delayed five minutes beyond its time.

“Hark! I hear wheels!” She raised her finger and listened.

They came nearer and nearer, and, as they stopped in front of the house, she glided swiftly and joyously into the hall. I sat still in the back-parlor, knowing that the meeting would be robbed of half its sweetness by the presence of lookers-on, however friendly. I was, therefore, not too well pleased when Miss Dalrymple’s voice made itself heard most loudly in the little bustle of greeting, and surprised at seeing her enter the room with her cousins, equipped in hat, cloak, and furs, and glowing from the cold air of the rainy outer night.

“James was my only accomplice,” she was saying, in high glee. “I stole down to the stable while he was getting the carriage ready to go to the depot, and offered myself as inside passenger. I knew that I should be refused permission if I applied to head-quarters. Don’t look so serious, Cousin Leah, please! The rain didn’t hurt me one bit, and, after all, it is not much more stormy than it was last night, when you drove down yourself to meet Miss Allison. Was I very wicked, Cousin Charles? I did want to see you *so* badly!”

“Nonsense, child! Who thinks of scolding you?” Mr. Moore had welcomed me with cordial grace, and now turned to the questioner, who had fastened herself upon his arm. “And yet I am not sure that you do not merit a whipping for exposing yourself upon this inclement night. Let me see — are you wet?” touching her cloak. “Indeed, Nettie dear, this is not safe! Your clothing is very damp. Run away and change it. Had you rubbers on?”

Janetta put out a pretty little foot, smiling wilfully. It was covered by a thin-soled gaiter.

"Was there ever such another imprudent creature!" exclaimed her cousin, frowning. "Is there a fire in your room?"

"No; the register heats it sufficiently for a warm-blooded animal like myself."

"Leah, my love, cannot one be kindled there at once? It is dangerous for her feet to remain in this state! Those contemptible little shoes must be soaked, in only crossing the sidewalk. The pavements are flooded. Merely changing her gaiters will not do. Her feet should be well heated besides."

"Janetta had best get on dry stockings and slippers, and go down to the kitchen fire," Leah returned, coldly. "I cannot spare Catherine at present to light another in her chamber."

"There is no need! I had forgotten the sitting-room grate. Be off, you madcap! Put on other foot-gear and hurry down to the fire."

Janetta made him a low courtesy, and danced away, singing:—

"O, Willie, we have missed you,
Welcome, welcome home!"

"It is pleasant to be at home again!" said Mr. Moore, looking fondly down at his wife. "And how have you been, love? You are looking uncommonly well."

"I am very well, thank you!" was the reply, in a quiet tone. "Will you go up to your room now? Supper will soon be ready."

I saw him encircle her waist with his arm as they passed into the hall together.

He was undoubtedly an affectionate husband, and, so far as I was able to judge, worthy of the love she lavished upon him; yet I was provoked by the farce I had just witnessed. If the "child" and "madcap" — who was by the way twenty-three years of age, Leah had told me — if the "imprudent creature" chose to imperil her health and sacrifice her comfort to the

whim of meeting her favorite kinsman ten minutes earlier than she would have done, had she stayed at home like a sensible woman, Leah's practical suggestion was all the notice her folly deserved. For my part, I could have boxed her ears soundly for her officiousness, in the first place in cheating the waiting wife of her right of receiving the earliest greeting, and for her ridiculous trifling afterwards — the sensation she had created, engrossing him so completely that he had not had an opportunity to inquire after Leah's health until the vital subject of the wet shoes was disposed of. Nor did I relish the thought of her intrusion upon the twain in the cozy "snuggery," whither I knew that Leah would repair with her husband so soon as the needful changes were made in his travelling-dress. After a separation of more than a fortnight, it seemed but fair that they should be allowed five minutes undisturbed *tête-à-tête*.

In these circumstances I was glad that the supper-bell rang promptly at the usual hour. It was not responded to at once, it appeared; for a second and sharper summons soon tingled through the hall. Thinking it possible that I might be the delinquent, and that I was supposed to be in my chamber, instead of awaiting the arrival of the others where they had left me, I repaired to the dining-room. Leah only was there, arranging cups and saucers upon the tea-board before her, with flushed cheeks and brow slightly contracted in pain or impatience.

"I thought that I was the laggard so importunately summoned," said I, as she glanced up nervously.

She forced a smile. "Oh no! take a seat! The others must be in presently. Catherine, you had better go up and tell Mr. Moore that we are waiting. The oysters and steak will be spoiled. Perhaps he did not hear the bell."

Several minutes more passed in uneasy silence, and Miss Janetta's high, gay tones were heard upon the staircase and along the passage. She entered, hanging upon Mr. Moore's

arm, after a fashion she particularly affected with him, both hands clasped over her support, and face upturned, as a sunflower turns its disk to the sun.

“Cousin Leah, I am afraid we have sinned unpardonably at last. The truth is we were so busy talking that we did not notice the bell. Cousin Charles has been away so long that I had a thousand things to tell him and to hear. And after Catherine called us, he was in the midst of such an interesting story that we really forgot her and supper. Do forgive us this once, you dear angel of punctuality!”

Leah said nothing, and Mr. Moore looked surprisedly at her grave face. Janetta hung her head as if abashed, and there was an awkward pause, broken at length, awkwardly, too, I doubt not, by a question from myself to the gentleman of the party, concerning his late trip. He took up the thread I threw out, with alacrity. He was a rarely agreeable man in conversation, sprightly and sensible, with much ready humor, as well as fine feeling. The talk was kept up with considerable spirit between us two until Miss Dalrymple rallied from her embarrassment, real or feigned, and Leah had fought successfully her fit of displeasure or discontent. Janetta had made a becoming toilet in a marvellously short space of time — one that offered a striking contrast to the *dishabille* of the previous evening. Her hair waved in a cloud of ringlets, crisp and smooth, despite the unfavorable dampness of the air; and her black silk dress, with its bands of crape, made her skin seem transparently clear and white. She wore short sleeves — a favorite custom with fine pianists, I have remarked — and her arms showed round and fair against her dress. She had a good color, and as she gradually brightened up under the influence of her cousin's lively chat, she looked really very pretty. Her coming out from under the shadow of Leah's disapprobation was adroitly managed; her appealing, deprecatory tone and expression as

she ventured, after an interval of cowed silence, to address the mistress of the house ; her obvious anxiety to show her every attention that she could contrive, and the shy, child-like questioning glance from time to time at Mr. Moore, as asking his countenance and advice, were wonderful and interesting to behold, even while I had but a glimmering consciousness of their intent.

When we arose from the table, Mr. Moore allowed his cousin and myself to precede him to the parlors, and tarried behind to speak with his wife. Miss Janetta's liveliness vanished rapidly as minute after minute went by without their reappearance. She pretended to peruse the evening papers, skimmed a column in each, threw them down, and walked to the window, drummed a polka with her fingers upon the sash, yawned, sighed, and sauntered back to the centre-table where I sat, sewing.

"I wish Charles would come in ! I am dying to hear the rest of the story he began before supper."

"He is with Mrs. Moore, I suppose," I answered.

"Oh ! of course ! and there is no knowing when they will get through their affectionate confabulation. Why is it that all married people are selfish, I wonder ?"

"Perhaps because they have a better right than others to the monopoly of the society of those whom they love best."

I made the observation very innocently, in fact thoughtlessly, supposing her to be more in jest than in earnest, but chancing to raise my head as I said it, I was startled at the strange change in Miss Dalrymple's countenance. Anger, scorn, inquiry glared upon me for a second from eyes I had not thought capable of such intense expression. It was suppressed before I could quite credit the evidence of my own senses, and saying carelessly : "Perhaps so ; but it is in very bad taste, to say the least of it" — she tossed her head and went to the piano.

She had played for fifteen or twenty minutes when Leah entered alone. All trace of unpleasant feeling had passed from her sparkling face. In her hand was a small box, or morocco case, which she held towards me, with a proud smile. "Would you like to see my present?"

It consisted of bracelet, brooch, and watch-chain, exquisitely manufactured of dark hair, linked and banded with gold; each article marked "C. H. M. to L. M."

"It is his own hair, I suppose?" I said, admiringly.

"Certainly! and therein lies the charm of the gift. If he were not a very Absalom in the luxuriance of his locks, he would have come home to me a shorn lamb."

"Miss Dalrymple!" I had to call twice, the piano being by this time *fortissimo*. "Excuse me for interrupting you, but do come and look at this beautiful *gage d'amour*! This is not much like an almost three-year-old husband, is it?"

She could not, in decency, refuse to obey the summons, or I believe she would have done so, but she drew near slowly, and surveyed the jewelry with a curling lip.

"They are handsome!" she said, after a momentary examination, giving back to Leah the casket I had laid in her unwilling hand. "I congratulate you upon the valuable acquisition to your jewel-case."

Anything more dryly frigid than her voice and manner, it is impossible to imagine. Her affectation of regarding the intrinsic worth of the ornaments as their only claim to the recipient's notice, was inimitable.

"Is the girl obtuse or malicious, or meanly and preposterously envious?" I speculated, in inward indignation.

Leah smiled contemptuously, and began trying the bracelet upon her arm.

"Was there ever a better fit?" she said, as her husband came in.

"There is nothing miraculous in that ! You speak as if I were not expected to know the precise size of your arm by this time. You do not understand the clasp, I see. Let me fasten it."

He shut the spring ; raised the hand adorned by his gift to his lips, half in mock gallantry, half in real affection, and while Leah stood smiling and blushing, like a maiden receiving her first love-pledge, he removed the pin she wore from her collar and substituted the new brooch, then detached the gold chain from her watch and hung the hair one in its place.

"Now that you are arrayed to my satisfaction, if not to your own, your ladyship must tell me what you think of a trifle I have in my pocket for Nettie. Nettie, child !"

She had feigned not to see or hear anything of the little love-scene which had just transpired, and now threw him a glance over her shoulder — still seated upon the piano-stool, striking aimless, random chords upon the instrument. He had to go to her, for she did not offer to move. Opening a case, similar in appearance to Leah's, he displayed a set of jet ornaments which I saw, at a glimpse, were far more costly than the hair trinkets.

"Not for me !" she ejaculated, when he put them into her lap.

"Why not for 'me !' " rejoined he, smiling at her incredulous, startled air.

"Because — because — nobody ever thinks of doing such things for me, now-a-days ! There was a time — " She burst into tears.

Much moved by her distress, Mr. Moore laid his hand upon her bowed head.

"There, dear ! Think of the true friends who are still spared to you ! Why, Nettie, I shall esteem myself a cruel bungler if you are so overcome by such a trivial token of my affection."

"*You* cruel! you, the kindest, best, most generous of men!" catching his hand and pressing it first to her heart then to her lips. "I should be ungrateful, indeed, were I to refuse to acknowledge and value your goodness! Forgive me, Cousin Leah! I know you must despise me for my weakness — that I am a silly baby in your sight, but I was so astonished and so pleased —"

"And so tearful," interposed Mr. Moore, "that you have not given my poor toy a second look."

He took up a bracelet. She extended a plump white arm, and smiled an entreaty through her tears. He responded by clasping the jet circlelets — there was a pair of them — upon her wrists, dropping upon one knee to effect this. The pin he would have let her settle herself upon her bosom, but there was some trouble about the catch, and when she had worked away at it for a moment he had to come to the rescue. Lastly, he suspended the ear-rings from the pink lobes of her small ears, and she ran to the mirror with a show of childish delight that highly amused and pleased the donor.

"What a monkey you are!" he said, tapping her cheek, as she stood gazing up at him, her eyes hardly dry, while her features were wreathed with grateful, loving smiles. "One would think that I had done you some mighty service — saved your life, or something of equal importance."

"I wish I could thank you," she returned, with passionate earnestness. "Only tell me how I may, in some way, prove my gratitude for your constant benefits to a poor, homeless orphan."

"By being a happy girl! That is all; unless it be by showing that you have been an obedient one during my absence. How about that formidable batch of new music? If you have learned it all, I have a further supply for you in my trunk."

"For Miss Janetta Dalrymple — the reward of good conduct

and diligent application to her studies !' That was the way my school-prizes used to be labelled," laughed the young lady, going back to the piano.

Mr. Moore made a brief apology to Leah and myself; begged that we would not allow the music to be any bar to our conversation, and followed, flute-case in hand.

While the performances went on we sat by the table, busy with our needles, and, contrary to his injunction, were silent, more through disinclination to speech, than any scruples of politeness.

It was no hardship for me to remain a mute listener so far as my individual self was concerned, for Miss Dalrymple played remarkably well, and Mr. Moore was a flutist of no mean ability; still, I could not recollect that I had ever enjoyed an entertainment of this kind less. If this were a specimen of the Moore's usual evenings at home, it was not a matter of surprise that Leah should often be lonely, and sigh for some friend or companion of her own. To the gentle-hearted Griselda, held up for the admiration and imitation of wedded dames, by the model tales and essays of man's and spinsters' composing, it would have been an easy cross — if it deserved to be called a cross at all — this open neglect of herself and marked preference for the society of another upon the evening of the reunion, to which she had looked forward with eager desire for more than two long weeks. But Leah was no Griselda. She was a loving, and because a devoted, an exacting wife. Her husband was the sun of her world, and she demanded equal constancy in him. I did not imagine then, nor do I really believe, now, that he was inconstant, even in thought, to the matchless woman he had freely chosen to be his life's helpmeet; but I did think him strangely, if not selfishly thoughtless, and ridiculously fond of the fussy little piece of cousinship, who was so crazy about him. There is no accounting for

tastes, especially a man's tastes, but I could not see how he could do more than barely tolerate the companionship of this girl when he contrasted her with his truly dignified and fascinating partner.

Musing thus, I looked across the table at Leah. Her work had fallen to her knees; her hands were folded above it, and her regards were bent upon the pair at the piano. The gaze of weary wretchedness thrilled and appalled me, so fixed and despairing was it, and to me so unexpected. Strong-minded and clear-judging woman that she was, she must have suffered much, and that not without cause, before yielding to the conviction that, it was plain, now possessed her soul. Never in my life before had I hated any one with the energy that, at that instant, moved my soul against Janetia Dalrymple, and almost as heartily I despised the vanity or undue partiality of him who thus consulted and ministered to her vagaries and sentimental impulses, instead of watching first and always the deeper, more even current of the mighty flood ever flowing towards him, and him alone, from his wife's true, noble heart.

I must have made some involuntary gesture of hand or head, for Leah turned suddenly and caught my eye. She grew deathly pale, and drew her breath in with a gasp of alarm or hysteric emotion, then with a powerful effort, for which I honored and loved her the more, she spoke collectedly.

"I am not well. I am afraid that I have over-exerted myself to-day. I feel, at times, such nausea and faintness, and my head throbs violently. I suppose prudence would dictate that I should go to bed without further delay. What do you think?"

"Unquestionably you ought. It is wrong for you to sit up a minute longer than is absolutely necessary, if such are your feelings!" I replied, decidedly, as I knew she meant I should. "Shall I go up with you?"

"By no means! I had rather you stayed here and made my apology for taking French leave. Good-night!" She leaned over my chair and kissed me — an icy touch, that made me shiver. "Don't disturb them," she whispered, seeing me glance towards the unconscious performers. "I often steal away without their knowing it. I am frequently sick and worn out by evening; but this will not last forever, I hope. For the present, a good-night's rest is the best medicine for me."

It was a full half hour before Mr. Moore looked around and missed his wife.

"Where is Leah?" he asked.

"She was seized with sudden faintness some time since, and obliged to retire," I responded, very gravely.

"Is it possible? Why did not she tell me of it?"

"I wished to do so, but she would not allow it."

Before the words were out of my mouth he had vanished, and I heard his fleet, light step go up the stairs, taking two at a bound.

"She wasn't much sick, was she?" queried Miss Janetta, turning the leaves of her music-folio.

"She looked very ill. She is subject to these attacks in the evening, she says. What do you do for her at such times?"

"*I!* She never complains in my hearing, except of being tired and sleepy; but I thought that was to be expected" — with a disagreeable smile. "Moreover, she does not fancy my music very much, I imagine, and would be glad of any pretext for interrupting it."

"Would it not be more kind, if that is the case, to deny yourself the gratification of practising so much in her presence?" I was provoked into saying.

The girl's impertinent tone, and total disregard of the comfort and feelings of her hostess, above all, her sneering disrespect, nettled me beyond endurance. She drew herself up with an assumption of offended dignity.

"You lose sight of the fact that I play to please my cousin, and at his express request, Miss Allison. I presume that his wishes, as master of this house and my guardian, are entitled to some consideration."

I had thrown down the gauntlet, and she had not hesitated to pick it up. From that moment I understood that she recognized in me Leah's partisan and, as a consequence, her own enemy, and whatever semblance of civility we might maintain in the presence of others, our swords were always unsheathed to each other's eyes. Less than three minutes had elapsed when Mr. Moore came running down stairs.

"She is sleeping quietly and soundly," he reported. "I hope it was merely fatigue. She *will* overwork herself! We will try that duett once more, Nettie. I am fearful that you find our music a bore, Miss Allison; but we will not tax your patience much longer. I only want to conquer an obstinate passage in a piece we have been playing. It is one of my idiosyncracies that if I fail to master any portion of a composition, I am haunted by it incessantly, until I can attack it again."

"Perseverance is the secret of most successes in this world," was the only and very lame truism that arose to my tongue. Presently I ventured to add: "There is no danger that the music may awaken Leah, is there?"

"None whatever! Her room being in the back of the house, the sound of the piano is scarcely audible there. She would not mind it, if she heard it ever so plainly."

I saw Miss Dalrymple hold down her head to conceal a smile. She had the coolest, most intolerable, and unanswerable sneer I ever saw upon woman's face. Heaven forbid that I should ever behold it upon another's!

"Put your foot upon the soft pedal, Nettie," Mr. Moore had the grace to say.

“Certainly, if you wish it; but it will spoil the effect of the finest passages.”

She contrived to do this so effectually that the recommendation to subdue the volume of sound was soon revoked.

“My fingers ache!” was her complaint when the duett was finished. “Sit down!” drawing a chair close to her side. “I have something to show you — something which I am too stupid to comprehend. I want the aid of your quicker brain.”

It was an obscure passage in a piece which she was a long time in finding. The interim was passed in low and, to me, inaudible dialogue. Mr. Moore had to lean forward to read from the sheet when it was finally produced, and it was perhaps an unconscious action on his part, throwing his arm about her waist as he bent over. Her head drooped sideways until her cheek almost touched his, and her curls mingled with the raven profusion which poor Leah had likened to Absalom’s.

“Why ‘*poor Leah?*’” I asked myself, in severe candor. This girl was Mr. Moore’s cousin; he regarded her as a sister. She had peculiar claims, by reason of her loneliness and affliction, upon his compassion and affection. There was nothing covert in his fondness — no thought of evil, or it would not be so openly manifested. My notions were perhaps prudish, old maidish — for I was fast growing into an old maid in years — and why not in overstrained notions of propriety also? But these self-chidings and efforts after charitable judgment could not blind my mental and moral perceptions to one fact: Mr. Moore’s feelings for and conduct towards his petted cousin gave his wife keen pain; and, if he were aware of this, his present behavior was reprehensible in the highest degree. Leah might be sensitively jealous beyond reason; but she was *his wife*, fond, faithful, and self-sacrificing; and as such, her whims should have the weight of laws with him.

The knotty musical point required a great deal of discussion,

carried on in the same confidential undertone, varied by an occasional coquettish laugh from Miss Dalrymple. Had the talkers both been unmarried, I should have esteemed my position as third person embarrassing and indecorous, and beat an early retreat. As it was, I stood, or rather sat my ground, and read a late periodical. At last, the prolonged conference was ended by Mr. Moore's removing the little hand that had, unintentionally, doubtless, stolen up to a resting-place upon his shoulder, and saying, more loudly than he meant to, "Come, darling! this is selfish in us!"

He quitted her side and came forward to my table, again apologizing for his apparent neglect of me by representing his passionate love of music.

"Leah tells me that I am music-mad, and I think in my sober moments, that she is right. Then follow resolutions of moderate indulgence in future—a praiseworthy intention, forgotten the next time I see or hear an instrument."

This was probably true. I had seen and heard of the like instances before, and I told him so, without suggesting that there might be weakness in the infatuation. From this we rambled to other topics, Miss Janetta taking little share in the conversation; and at the close of perhaps a quarter of an hour, she remarked, with amiable reluctance, that it must be growing late. We all arose at this; she returning the scattered music to the folios with diligent haste, and Mr. Moore assisting me to gather up the various implements of feminine industry that lay upon the table. Some of these belonged to Leah, and I stopped in the sitting-room, on my way to bed, to leave them there.

The door leading into her chamber was ajar, and as I struck against a chair in the dark, she called, faintly, "Catherine! is that you?"

"It is I, dear Leah! How do you feel now? Have you

had a refreshing sleep?" I said, going up to the bed, and laying my hand upon her hot forehead.

"I have not slept at all! My head aches too badly!"

I expressed no surprise. I could understand the reasons that had induced her to feign slumber to her husband. He should not suspect that *heartache*, and not bodily ailment kept her awake.

"What can I do for you?" asked I.

"Nothing — unless you will be so kind as to bring me the bottle of volatile salts I left in your room this morning. I mistook you for Catherine, and wished to send her for it."

I rejoined that she should have it immediately, and went in quest of the desired article, which I remembered having seen that evening, not where she believed she had left it, but upon the parlor mantel. The stair-carpet was thick, my slippers light, and, without a thought of making a stealthy descent, or a suspicion that my coming would be *mal apropos*, I reached the lower rooms unheard by the cousins — had passed the threshold before I noticed them, or they perceived me.

Mr. Moore stood in the centre of the apartment, his arm closely enfolding Janetta's form; her head lay upon his bosom: her hands were clasped behind his neck, and at the moment of my entrance he stooped to kiss her, with a murmur of inarticulate fondness.

"Oh! the rapture of having you home again! I have been so desolate — so weary-hearted!" burst from her lips.

The "rapture" was arrested by the sight of the intruder. Her exclamation of dismay; her breaking away from his embrace; the crimson tide that deluged her face, were proof sufficient to convict her of unworthy, if not guilty sentiments in maintaining her share of this questionable intimacy. Mr. Moore reddened slightly, but without losing his self-possession.

"Have you lost anything, Miss Allison?" he queried, politely.

I walked straight by him to the mantel.

"Leah asked me to bring her this smelling-bottle."

"Ah! is she awake and sick?"

"She has had a miserable evening." I did not care in what sense he took my curt rejoinder.

"Indeed! please say that I will be up directly — so soon as I can lock up the house," going towards the windows to shut the blinds. "I should have been with her long ago, had I not hoped and believed that she was asleep."

He was in earnest, now, with his preparations for retiring, for the clatter of bolts pursued me on my upward journey, and it was to overcome this noise that Miss Dalrymple raised her voice to an imprudent pitch. I could not avoid hearing the uncomplimentary observation uttered in blended anger and alarm.

"Now there will be mischief! The prying, tattling old maid came back on purpose!" and the beginning of Mr. Moore's reply, spoken in calm decision: —

"I have done nothing wrong —"

Here I passed beyond hearing.

CHAPTER III.

I HAVE been thus minute in my description of the scenes immediately succeeding Charles Moore's return to his home, both because they were my initial lesson in the knowledge of the true state of affairs in the household, and because they will best convey to the reader a conception of the many links — no single one of which was worthy of serious notice, that yet, taken altogether, formed a chain whose grievous weight was bowing my poor friend's heart and soul to the dust. It would be derogatory to my self-respect were I to trouble myself to assert that I never, by look or word, intimated to Leah aught concerning the picturesque tableau I had broken up on that night. I fancied that Mr. Moore appreciated my discretion and was grateful for the same, for his treatment of myself was, in every respect, unexceptionable. He took great pains to render my stay in the town and house agreeable, devising excursions and entertainments, which he supposed would suit my taste, and accompanying me in these with alacrity and apparent pleasure. I would have declined going out upon many such occasions, but Leah opposed this inclination so positively, and so often exerted herself to an imprudent extent to make one of the party, when she suspected that I designed to remain at home with her, that I generally yielded to her importunities and played *Mademoiselle De Trop* with what grace I could.

For *de trop* I was, whenever there was but three in the company, and Miss Dalrymple did not scruple to make me feel

this, when she could accomplish the lady-like feat without attracting our cavalier's attention. One instance of her disposition to claim him entirely for herself recurs to me with particular force. A heavy fall of snow was followed by moonlight nights of rare beauty, and a temperature so mild that one marvelled at the solidity of the white carpet spread thickly over the earth.

"Ladies, what say you to a sleigh-ride this evening?" questioned Mr. Moore at dinner, the day after the storm. "Don't all speak at once!"

Leah smiled at the silence that ensued.

"Nobody seems to be in haste to accept your tempting invitation," she remarked. "Why not 'all at once?'"

"Because my cutter holds but three, with moderately close storing, and I wish to avoid the predicament of being called upon to decide between claimants for the privilege of being one of the passengers."

"I could not go if there were room for a dozen without packing," she returned. "So the matter is settled without perplexity to yourself or to us. Maria and Janetta will compose your load."

Janetta ate on in sober taciturnity, although I had heard her wishing for a sleigh-ride that very morning.

"I must be excused, if you please," said I. "I had the toothache last night, and dare not venture out in the evening."

"But the air is so pure and dry, almost as bland as summer, and you can wrap up your head and face! I cannot consent to your missing such a treat!" insisted Leah.

Her husband civilly seconded her arguments; but honestly believing that the exposure would be injudicious, I remained firm in my declinature.

"So, Nettie," said Mr. Moore, with affected chagrin, "you are the only one who does not excuse herself from the pleasure

or *displeasure* of accompanying me! I warn you that I shall expect you to make up for both losses and mortification."

Janetta Dalrymple danced about the house that afternoon like a mad creature — in an irrepressible flutter of exultation, oddly at variance with her manner of listening to the proposition, as first made, and its discussion.

"Will night *never* come?" she cried, meeting Mr. Moore in the upper hall about five o'clock.

"It is almost dark now!" he returned, laughing. "Do you then anticipate so much delight in this frolic — this moonlight flitting?"

"Delight! could I fail to have it?"

Leah's appearance interrupted her.

"Charles," she said, coming to the sitting-room door, "I was just about to dispatch a note to you. Can I speak to you for a moment?"

"I came up home for some papers —" he began, just as the door shut them in.

The result of the conference was soon made known to me by Leah, who sought me in my chamber for that purpose.

"I am here to entreat you to reverse your purpose of staying at home to-night. I have changed my mind; so there's a worthy precedent for you. Henry Ellis — my cousin — called awhile ago to offer us his double sleigh in exchange for our lighter cutter. His wife is not at home, and he wishes to drive a fast trotter instead of a pair of sober family studs. He wants Charles to put in one of his horses with ours, and take us all. I am going, and so are you! We have fur robes enough to smother you, a footstove, and foot-blankets, and I have provided a phial of toothache medicine, in case of casualties. There is no use in saying a word!"

I submitted, not reluctantly, for the prospect of the drive was tempting, and already the merry din of the passing sleigh-

bells made the blood bound more quickly in my veins. We took a hurried cup of tea to prepare us for the excursion, and, by a queer chance, the alteration in the programme was not mentioned at the table, the meal being discussed in unusual silence. Janettha begged to be excused before the rest of us were half through, and sped off to her room, carolling fragments of the sleigh-bell waltz, as she ran.

"How that girl enjoys life!" said Mr. Moore. "It is a genuine pleasure to afford her a diversion like that of this evening; she partakes of it with such zest, such child-like abandon!"

The observation was directed to me, and I rejoined, very safely and truly: "She does indeed seem to be in fine spirits to-night."

Leah and I stood in the hall, wrapped in furs and hoods, before Janettha made her appearance. She was unpunctual to a proverb.

"Come, little one! come, birdie!" called Mr. Moore, at the stair-head. He had an exhaustless store of pet names for her. "We are waiting!"

"I am coming — yes, I'm coming!
With my *furs* about my feet!"

she sang from the floor above.

This trick of parodying her favorite songs was a great habit with her. She came down upon the run, and was close upon us before she saw either of the unlooked-for additions to the party. The fall of her countenance was actually ludicrous.

"Why, how is this? I had not understood!" she stammered, thrown completely off her guard by the suddenness of the disagreeable discovery.

Mr. Moore explained the causes of the change in his plans, after a style that savored too much of the apologetic to suit me. She made no reply, except by her looks, which betokened un-

qualified dissatisfaction. She even hung back, as half inclined to decline going at all, when he would have handed her in after us. Her cousin spoke to her in a low tone of displeased exposition, of which I caught but two words — “unreasonable” and “jealous.” Sulkily submitting to the impetus of his hand, she was placed upon the front seat. This was always her chosen position ; it mattered not that I often occupied the back alone. It had occurred to me that Leah might, once in a while, prefer to ride by the side of her husband, but she never expressed such a preference in my hearing. I could see, in the clear moonlight, that our gallant charioteer made repeated efforts to engage his companion in conversation, bending to her ear with whispered soothings or entreaties, and watching her countenance with anxious attention. She was obstinate in her dejection, keeping her face averted, and replying to him by monosyllables, or gestures. At last he showed signs of the spirit he should have exhibited at the outset ; ignored her presence, and devoted himself to amusing Leah and myself.

We rode for more than two hours, and the talk was hilarious, as befitted the scene. The broad roads were filled with swiftly gliding equipages, and the air resonant with merry voices and chiming bells. Janetta paid little visible heed to what was going on about her ; took no part in the interchange of salutations that were continually passed, as we met acquaintances and friends. She had drawn her veil closely over her face, and sat bolt upright, looking neither to the right nor the left, without uttering one syllable. As we neared home, she lifted her handkerchief to her eyes, and her cousin bestowed a searching, sidelong glance upon her, from which circumstances I inferred that her obdurate mood had assumed a softer form. She went quickly into the house, upon alighting at our door, and straight on to her chamber, her veil still wrapped over her features. Leah’s thoughtfulness and bountiful hospitality had provided

a hot supper for us — coffee, oysters, and biscuit — which was served in the upper sitting-room, by the time we had divested ourselves of our muffings. Mr. Moore, in dressing-gown and slippers, looking very gay, comfortable, and handsome, occupied his arm-chair at the head of the little round table. Leah sat opposite, and I at his right. The chair to the left remained vacant.

“My dear, have you sent for Nettie?” inquired the host, as he dipped the ladle in the smoking tureen.

“I have. She does not wish any supper.”

“What!” suspending his hand midway between his dish and plate.

“She does not care for supper, she says,” repeated Leah, quietly.

“There must be some mistake! I never knew her to refuse oysters before, let them be offered when they might. She is surely not well.”

“I sent up a second message to inquire if she were indisposed, and if I might supply her with a cup of coffee in her room. She declined taking any refreshment, and said that she was very well.”

Mr. Moore ladled out a plateful of the savory “stew” for me, and another for his wife; then pushed his chair back.

“I will go up and speak to Nettie myself.”

“Charles!” ejaculated his wife.

“I will be back in a moment, my love,” and he was gone.

I have seen Charles Moore grieve and wound his wife more times than I like to remember. I never saw her angry with him except this once; yet her temper was naturally quick. She did not comment upon his conduct during his absence; finished pouring out the coffee; ordered the servant to replace the cover of the tureen, and dismissed her, saying that she would summon her when she was needed. After this there was no more said for the next ten minutes. Mr. Moore was gone at least that

long. Leah's flushed cheek, flashing eye, and compressed mouth were enough to deter a bolder person than myself from opening a conversation upon indifferent topics, and every principle of honor and delicacy withheld both of us from alluding to the subject that engrossed our minds.

Charles' temper was less inflammable than his wife's, and while he looked annoyed upon his return from his fruitless errand, he yet accosted us with his customary cheerful courtesy.

"Nettie begs to be excused from appearing again to-night, ladies. I have been scolding her a little, and the poor, sensitive child is nearly heart-broken."

"Did she send no apology for her unjustifiable rudeness to Miss Allison and myself during our ride?" asked Leah, sternly.

"She is very sorry that she marred the pleasure of our excursion by her silly moodiness. There is no accounting for woman's whims and humors, Miss Allison."

"Pray, do not judge all women by Janetta Dalrymple!" Leah's vexation mastered her prudence. "Her behavior this evening was more than whimsical. It was ill-bred and unkind — a display of temper such as no lady would be guilty of."

"You are hard upon her, Leah. She has her faults; but she is incapable of offering an intentional insult to any one, particularly to a friend whom she respects, and a connection whom she loves as sincerely as she does you."

"A depth of respect I should never have suspected had not you informed me of it! I am sorry to say it, Charles, very sorry to disagree with you upon this or any other point; but I do not think that you are going the right way to work to correct Janetta's faults, if that is your wish. She is both unreasonable and selfish."

"Just what I have been telling her, my dear wife; so we agree there! If you please, we will dismiss this matter for the

present. It is an exquisitely painful thought to me that my favorite relative — one whose attachment to myself is that of a sister for an elder brother, should have failed so signally to conquer your prejudices and win your affection. Don't suppose that I blame you for this, however! I *know* that she tries hard to please you, to make you love her, and I think that you are not intentionally unkind to her; but I believe, Miss Allison, that it is a well-established although an unexplained fact, that no two women, however excellent and lovely, can dwell for two months under the same roof in perfect concord."

I answered that I had certainly known exceptions to his rule, and passed, gladly, to other themes of discourse.

In this single instance I could not acquit Leah of blame. She had spoken injudiciously, and at the wrong time; yet my heart ached for her none the less on this account. I may not, in my spinsterly experience, be the best judge of such questions, but it appears to me that few women, who really love their husbands, could have borne more patiently the spectacle of the petulant disappointment, the undisguised chagrin, excited in a young and fond maiden by the discovery that, instead of her being permitted to enjoy the anticipated affectionate *tête-à-tête* with the said husband, his lawful spouse was to form one of the company. I doubt if even Griselda, milk-and-water angel though she was, would, out of the plenitude of her insipid amiability, have witnessed such an exhibition, unmoved by some spice of conjugal jealousy, or that she would not have set her wits to work to conjecture what could be the nature of the intercourse which was thus impatient of the presence and surveillance of her who should have been the gentleman's best friend and prime counsellor. Between ourselves, moreover, dear reader, I do not believe that Griselda loved her kingly lord with one tithe of the fervor that glowed in the bosom of this untitled American wife for hers.

Miss Janetta never apologized to the object of her profound respect or to her visitor for her misbehavior, nor did her demeanor to us bear that salutary fruits of repentance and reformation, *malgré* her cousin's scolding and her consequent broken-heartedness. In his absence she favored us with very little of her society, a deprivation we could not deplore while her uniform bearing, when she did vouchsafe the honor, was flippant and supercilious, and herself a decided specimen of the *nil admirari* school, so far as our pursuits and plans were concerned. To Mr. Moore, she was a totally different being; her perpetual outbreaks of artless enthusiasm; her girlish warmth of speech and action reminding me of nothing so much as the encomium passed upon Miss Merry Pecksniff by her poetic admirer: "Oh, she was a gushing young thing!" She affected no secrecy as to her doting love for her cousin — "her best, her only friend!" She worshipped him abroad, as at home and in private, and Charles Moore was not superior to the weakness of liking to be worshipped by an attractive woman. What man — unless he be an anchorite or a dullard — is not liable to fall into the like temptation?

The intimacy between the idol and the devotee became more marked each day, and the slighted wife still saw all — perchance saw and feared more than did really exist, and suffered silently. It is not suffering like this that makes the soul strong. I verily think that Leah could have borne more easily entire estrangement and divorce from her husband than the anomalous existence she led just now. Then there would have been no ground for hope, no food for love, such as the presence, the loving looks and words, the acts of kindness and liberality that now brought with them a wildly sweet agony. O to have so much and yet not possess *all*! It was very selfish; but then, as Miss Dalrymple has remarked, "all married people are selfish." I take the liberty of adding on my own authority, "Or ought to be!"

Leah and I were paying a call, one afternoon, at a house that stood exactly opposite to Mr. Moore's law-office.

"Why do you not bring that nice little cousin of yours to see me, Mrs. Moore?" asked the hostess, by and by. "I have taken quite a fancy to her from seeing her in the street. She seems to be very fond of out-door exercise."

Leah made answer that this was the case.

The lady continued: "Not a day passes, unless the weather is very stormy, that she does not call in at Mr. Moore's office, across the way, and she often tempts him to join her in her rambles. I like to watch them walking together. They appear to be very much attached to one another."

"Mamma!" The speaker's daughter checked her innocent volubility. "You have dropped your spectacles!" And in restoring them, she gave her senior a meaning look that silenced her.

"They *are* very sincerely attached to one another!" replied Leah, composedly. "It would be strange if they were not, since they were reared almost like children of the same mother."

The world should not asperse his fair fame, however grievously her confidence in him might be shaken. She would play her part bravely in public, if the lacerated heart quivered and bled to death in the effort.

How long would this false and hollow show of tranquillity last? how long the surface of the groaning deep smile, as with summer calm? were thoughts that haunted me day and night. I inwardly condemned Leah's reserve with her husband as much as I admired her concealment of the true state of her domestic affairs from others. While she bore his name, and lived with him in seeming amity as his wife, she had no right to smother thoughts within her breast that were eating away her life; to brood darkly and secretly over imaginations that

multiplied, and were magnified in the darkness. Her skirts were not quite clear while this policy was pursued. Yet she was actuated by no mean cowardice or sullenness in adopting this course. A prouder woman never lived. She would have died sooner than play the spy upon another's actions. While she would, and did try to prevent the growth of the attachment between her husband and his cousin by all fair and honorable means; strove, conscientiously and constantly to win back the love she feared and believed was straying from her, she scorned to attack her persecutor with her own weapons, or to constrain, by reproaches and threats, the return of the recusant. She would not owe to duty and law that which should be the spontaneous tribute of a true and loving heart.

Thus matters stood when I was seized with a violent cold that confined me to my bed for several days. Leah spent most of the day, and a portion of each evening, in my apartment. Mr. Moore was busily engaged with preparations for an important suit in which he was counsel, and could spare but half an hour or so for his after-supper smoke and talk in the sitting-room — the pleasant home-chat which, Leah had once told me, was to her the most delightful event of the day, however choice might have been its other pleasures. She was uncommonly cheerful, the third evening of my confinement, although she came to me earlier than upon either of the two previous ones.

"Isn't Charles the most thoughtful fellow in the world?" was her introductory remark. "Overrun by business, as he is, he could yet remember the name of the book we were wishing for yesterday, and went half a dozen squares out of his way, as he came up town, to get it. Shall I commence it forthwith?"

I assented, gratifiedly; and seating herself under the shaded light, she began. The reading had lasted an hour and a half; when, detecting signs of hoarseness in her voice, I stopped

her, fearful lest she should be exhausted by the prolonged effort.

"It will be a sorry return to make Mr. Moore for his considerate attention to our wishes, if we present to him a voiceless wife in the morning!"

She laughed, and agreed to postpone the perusal of the volume to the morrow. Still holding it, and now and then turning a leaf, unwilling, as it were, to lay aside this tangible token of his remembrance of and kindness to her, she narrated, with affected carelessness, other examples of a similar nature; favors shown and benefits conferred, as *apropos*, and in a manner as delicate. In her happier moods — now, alas! far less frequent than of old — she enjoyed nothing more than to talk of him; and would enumerate his manifold virtues in my hearing with the simple-heartedness and circumstantiality of a child. I imagined sometimes that she strengthened her own faith in his affection by rehearsing these proofs of it to me. To-night, she was very hopeful with regard to other subjects, all bearing a close connection to this master emotion. She spoke of a certain and momentous event, now not many weeks distant, with calmness — even pleasure.

"We shall both be happier then, Maria, and I hope and feel that I shall be a better woman. I have grown irritable and unjust of late; have developed traits that not even the fact of my being a prey to this unfortunate and, it would seem, unconquerable nervousness can excuse. I told Charles this evening how heartily ashamed I was of my variable and pettish moods, and promised that, if he would bear with me a little longer, I would promise better things for the future."

I returned a cheering reply, and there was a pause. Mr. Moore's "den" — his wife's favorite aversion, according to her declaration, was directly above my room, and there penetrated the ceiling, now, the low murmur of a deep voice.

"Hear the man!" laughed Leah. "He is studying his tiresome briefs as a school-boy would con his spelling-book! Does he often amuse you in this way?"

"I have heard the same sound many times before," I rejoined.

She listened, smilingly. She loved the very echo of that voice better than she did the finest music in the world.

"He must enjoy hearing himself talk!" she resumed. "One might suppose him a magician holding converse with his familiar demon, conjured from the vasty deep by the incense of his inseparable cigar. Did you ever venture a look into the recesses of his grotto?"

"Never!"

"I will show you the mysterious chamber some day when he is not at home. I never approach the charmed precincts myself, if he is within. If he has a private study, it must be inviolable by all human foot during study hours, he says. This was the stipulation he made when he had the room fitted up. I could not bear to have him write and read in his office at night. It is an inexpressible comfort to know that the same roof covers us both, although I do not see him."

She retired early, quitting my room by ten o'clock; and, feeling myself unable to obey her injunction to immediate slumber, I lay listening idly to the slight sounds that, in this quiet quarter of the town, varied the silence of the night. The chief of these was the murmur overhead, and I found myself hearkening to it, after a while, with kindling interest. It was intermittent, I noticed, and in the deepening stillness without and within, I fancied, as it came more distinctly to my senses, that the tone was colloquial, not meditative or hortatory; next, that the pauses of irregular length were made to admit the replies of some one else; then, that a voice of different pitch and quality filled these up. I was dismissing the idea, with a

smile at my fantasies, when there fell into the room — I can use no other expression that would fitly describe the suddenness and weight with which it burst upon me — there fell into the room the unmistakable sound of a laugh — a peal, in which two voices blended, and I recognized both !

Janetta Dalrymple's chamber was likewise in the third story, at the back of the house, a situation she preferred on account of the view and seclusion ; and here she professed to spend her evenings in reading or writing, when we were without company, and she was not at the piano. This, then, was the inviolable sanctuary which the wife's footsteps must not approach ! this, the studious retirement, for which the industrious lawyer had forsaken her society ! here was the solution of the strange noises I had so frequently heard upon other occasions, when I had bidden Leah " Good-night," and sought my pillow ; oftentimes receiving with her kiss a sigh that " Charles *would* injure his health by studying so late and so much at night ! " There was no self-deception in the present case. I only wondered, as once and again Janetta's peculiar laugh set my teeth on edge, albeit it was not an unmusical one in itself, and her accents, less cautious than in the earlier part of the evening, or more audible by reason of the surrounding hush, offended my sensitive auriculars — I only marvelled that I was so late in arriving at the truth.

There was but one drop of comfort in the troubled thoughts that kept me awake far into the night — until after eleven o'clock, at which hour I heard a movement in the study overhead ; then a door close softly, and light footsteps retreat in the direction of Miss Dalrymple's room. Mr. Moore did not descend to his rest until past midnight ; but he did not study aloud. The single consolation which I derived from the events of the evening was that Leah had not suspected these clandestine interviews — I could give them no other name. Things

were assuming a more serious aspect. The reckless girl was not only betraying the confidence and abusing the hospitality of her hostess, but imperilling her own reputation in the eyes of servants and chance visitors. I wondered if it ever crossed Mr. Moore's mind what construction the prying curiosity of his domestics might put upon these prolonged and unseasonable visits of this young and fond cousin to a remote and lonely part of the house, well understood to be his private study — privacy, which even their mistress respected. I knew that Miss Janetta would have met such an impertinent insinuation with a bold face, and the maxim I had heard many times from her lips — “Evil to him that evil thinks.” Perhaps I *was* full of evil thoughts and all uncharitableness; but I could not resist the conviction that the majority of those whom this artless and daring damsel daily met in society would judge her conduct as I did — many more harshly.

Discoveries, like most other earthly events, are epidemic; and, being aware of this fact, I ought not to have been so startled and confused at a proposition made by Leah a few nights after I became convalescent. We were in the “snuggery” alone — Mr. Moore having pleaded urgent business to be transacted — deeds drawn, or copied, or something of that kind, and Miss Janetta bidden us a cool “Good-night,” without making any apology whatever. A ring at the front door heralded the appearance of the housemaid, burdened with a large bundle.

“From the dressmaker's, ma'am,” she said, delivering it to her mistress.

Leah sprang up gleefully. “Do you know, Miss Allison, that I have been doing something very naughty — something for which your ladyship will berate me very soundly? No? Then listen and behold! Do you remember the cashmere *robes de chambre* we were admiring the other day? I went out that afternoon and selected two — one for my unworthy

self, the other for somebody whose worth I know, and *you* do not ! ”

While speaking, her rapid fingers were tearing off the papers, and she now called upon me to take my choice of the wrappers. This was no easy matter, when both were so beautiful. I represented, vainly, that I would be delighted with either, and tried to thank her for her elegant gift. She interrupted me with declarations that I should make a selection, or she would force both upon me. We were precisely the same height ; our complexions were similar ; we had the same breadth of shoulder and length of arm, and these were all the requisites demanded in loose robes. I still hung back, and she suggested that we should try them on, and ascertain their comparative becomingness.

“ This redoubles difficulties ! ” was her decision, as we surveyed ourselves in the mirror ; then looked at one another from head to foot, and laughed like two school-girls in a masquerading frolic. “ I tell you what we will do ! We will besiege the ‘ den,’ drag Charles out, and make him settle the question ! The emergency of the case justifies extreme measures. His taste in ladies’ attire is infallible — perfectly miraculous ! ”

She ran off before I could collect thoughts and words to oppose her. I overtook her at the foot of the stairs.

“ But, Leah ! ”

“ But, Maria ! ”

“ I am afraid that Mr. Moore may not like our interrupting him.”

“ Of course, he will be as cross as a bear ; and we, being babies, are afraid of bears ! ” she retorted, ironically, conscious, as I was, that no extent of provocation from a lady could force her gentlemanly husband to an unseemly show of irritation. “ One would think, from your rueful visage, that you were go-

ing to peep into the cave of Trophonius. I will take the responsibility! Come, I say!"

I could not refuse to go without wounding or offending her; and, after all, Miss Dalrymple might be that instant buried in one of her favorite French novels in her own chamber — for once, harming nobody but herself. However this might be, I would linger some paces behind Leah, that she might first explore the forbidden region. At the entrance, she stopped and beckoned to me imperatively — her face arch, and glowing with mischief. I never saw her look so again.

"We will enter together — storm the garrison with united forces!" she whispered, seizing my hand.

Throwing the door wide open, she proclaimed, theatrically, "Enter an invading —" The words froze upon her lips.

Mr. Moore sat nearly facing the door upon a lounge, whereon half lay — reclined, she would have said — Miss Janetta. His arm was about her waist; her head was laid upon his shoulder; their hands were clasped, and his cheek rested upon her sunny hair. If the picture, seen but for one second, was burned, as if by lightning, upon my memory, how felt the deceived wife — the lofty-souled, pure-minded woman, who stood like a statue in the doorway, the amazed, outraged spectator of the group!

With a half scream of nervous horror, Janetta sprang to a sitting posture, and gazed, pale with affright, upon the unwelcome intruder. Mr. Moore met Leah's eye, not without a slight change of feature and color, but far more calmly than I had believed it practical for any man to appear in such circumstances. Either his self-control outmatched his cousin's, or his conviction of guilt was less strong. He arose, with no show of trepidation; but Leah's speech forestalled his.

"My business can wait. I will not interrupt you further!"

"Stay —" he began, eagerly; but the door was already shut, and I was following Leah down stairs.

She paused upon the threshold of her chamber. "You will excuse me if I leave you somewhat abruptly, Maria?"

"Certainly!"

We parted, without so much as a pressure of the hand. She was not yet brought so low in spirit to accept any sympathy — not even mine — upon this subject. Her husband came down a few minutes later, and for an hour and more, I could discern the faint murmur of their conversation. Perhaps it was as well that this denouement had taken place, I reflected. Despite this one great fault of conduct, I liked Charles Moore. I hoped that he had erred more through thoughtlessness, than lack of principle or from waning love for his wife; was certain that he had a very imperfect conception of the pain this, to his apprehension, lawful and innocent intimacy, had occasioned her. If he once understood what were her feelings and wishes with regard to it, every sentiment of manliness and affection would prompt him to pursue a different course, and this he must learn during the explanation now in progress. If Leah would only be true to herself, and just to him, he could not fail to derive a severe, but assuredly a useful lesson.

Thus hoping, I fell asleep, and dreamed that Janetta Dalrymple was comfortably supplied with a husband of her own, whose home was in California — an event that threw me into an ecstasy of joy, terminating prematurely the entrancing vision.

CHAPTER IV.

MISS DALRYMPLE came down to breakfast the next morning, *sola*, notwithstanding my dream — smilingly oblivious, so far as mien and words indicated, of having transgressed the slightest rule of good breeding, to say nothing of decorum or morality. She got a very grave, cool salutation all around the table in exchange for her bland “Good-morning.” Her first observation — a jaunty comment upon the weather — was directed to Leah, whose response was civil and brief; her next, playfully affectionate, was to her cousin. He replied in the dryest imaginable tone, scarcely looking at her as he did so; and turning away so soon as the sentence was finished, he began a conversation upon commonplace topics with me, occasionally appealing to Leah. Janetta’s demeanor was consummate in its well-acted surprise, deepening into injured feeling, and the *naïve* bewilderment of an innocent grieved child, at undeserved reproach. She could not eat; try though she seemed to do, to swallow her distress and breakfast together, and sat, throughout the remainder of the meal, mutely dejected. The uncomfortable repast to all of us was finally concluded. Mr. Moore arose, walked around to his wife’s seat, and gave her his customary “Good-by” kiss before going to his office; then, merely saying, “Good-morning, ladies!” to his cousin and myself, left the room. Miss Dalrymple followed him into the hall, as she often did, even when he had parted with her in our presence; had bestowed, with his brotherly kiss, a tap upon the cheek,

or a caressing stroke of the head, always some merry, affectionate word. When I went up stairs, they had withdrawn to the parlor, from which issued the sound of convulsive sobbing and Mr. Moore's mournfully resolute tones.

No Janetta appeared at dinner that day. "She was indisposed, and would take nothing to eat," Catherine reported. The tea-table was likewise denied the light of her countenance, and Mr. Moore looked wretchedly uneasy. His solicitude was so marked as to be distressing, when the morrow failed to bring her down to breakfast. His own appetite had deserted him and his temper was on the point of following its example, if one might judge from the unwonted asperity of his injunction to his wife.

"I *desire*, Leah, that you go up and see that poor child some time during the forenoon. She is here under my care, and, whatever may be her faults in your eyes, common humanity demands that she shall not suffer for want of attention while she is sick."

He had forgotten my presence ; but Leah was mindful of it ; and while she grew white to her very lips, rejoined, in calm dignity : "Your wishes shall be obeyed. I will see that she wants for nothing which I can procure or do for her."

The visit of inquiry was duly made : repeated in the afternoon and semi-daily, with conscientious regularity, during the term of the interesting sufferer's confinement. Those must have been queer interviews, I thought ; but Leah brought no report of them below, at least none to me. For five days, the grieving maiden maintained the *rôle* of invalid, persisting in her refusal to accept medical aid, and subsisting upon alarmingly light rations of tea and toast. I had no fears of her becoming dangerously enfeebled by this penitential regimen. She carried with her, into her retirement, an abundant supply of adipose matter to sustain her during a whole hibernation, and I applauded

her discrimination in having selected the means of punishment best adapted to her offence and present position with regard to the really injured party. But Mr. Moore's moodiness was fast changing into misery. True he rarely mentioned her name, and his attentions to Leah were assiduous — so studied and punctilious that she shrank from them in absolute pain. Still, his spirits had declined utterly; he ate little; talked fitfully and without animation, and was subject to spells of gloomy musing; in short, acted like a man who had met with a heavy, stunning blow — one which he felt to be irremediable.

Never had I regarded Leah with such love and reverence as during that trying week. There was not a spark of haughty resentment, not the most distant approach to retaliation in her manner to her husband. Another woman was pining for the demonstrations of affection he had pledged himself to withhold, and she could not but read in his altered bearing, his settled sadness and prolonged seasons of abstracted pensiveness, the terrible truth that she was no longer adequate to fill his heart, or make his home what he had avowed it to be in the past; yet she strove humbly and prayerfully, if not hopefully, to contribute all that she could to his comfort and happiness; was, to all intents and purposes, his slave. She kept up nobly the forced show of cheerfulness, not to him alone, but with me. Not an allusion to the unhappy estrangement, brought every hour to my notice, escaped her lips in our most confidential moments. Native strength of character and early discipline had taught her how to endure anguish and make no sign.

The overtried nerves and neglected body failed first. Charles Moore was aroused from his dream of selfish woe by her sudden and dangerous illness. For forty-eight hours I question whether he ever remembered Janetta Dalrymple's existence, unless, indeed, the thought were one lash in the whip of scorpions held by Remorse. All through the second night of his wife's sick-

ness, he walked the floor of the room adjoining her chamber, in a state of mind bordering upon distraction. With the dawn came tidings that, at another time, would have awakened a thrill of holy and happy emotion. When the nurse brought his first-born son to him, and would have given him, in proud ceremony, into his father's arms, the glassy eyes surveyed the tiny stranger as if they saw him not. There was no movement of fond welcome; the parched lips articulated but one sentence: "How is *she*?"

She was very low; not rational, and too weak, if she had been, to see even him.

"It is just!" he gasped, when the physician reluctantly recommended that he should not run the risk of agitating her by a visit. "It is just — only just!"

"I must confess that I was surprised at his ready acquiescence in my judgment," said the doctor to me, in describing the scene. "I was prepared to encounter strenuous opposition. These very devoted husbands are generally unruly under such a sentence."

I did not explain the hidden meaning of the exclamation that sounded to the man of medicine like the utterance of prudent submission to wise counsel; but my heart bled for the misguided being undergoing the agonies of an accusing conscience, that saw, in this exclusion from her presence in this fearful hour, a righteous retribution for his wilful neglect of her in the seasons of loneliness and debility, of trial and depression, that had contributed to bring about this critical condition of reason and health.

Janetta Dalrymple, now that her illness no longer produced a sensation, and brought discomfort to herself only, had found it convenient to declare it at an end, and made sundry shy overtures of consolation and sympathy to her kinsman, all of which he swept aside as if he saw them not. The deeper foun-

tains of his being were stirred, and in these she had no share. Slowly the beloved one struggled back to sanity and strength. She gazed, at first vacantly, then with loving anxiety, into the pale, sorrow-stricken face that now hardly left her bedside, day and night, more haggard by reason of the effort he made to smile, as he saw that he was recognized. Once more her tongue pronounced his name in fond, natural accents; her cheek was pillowed upon his breast, while great, scalding tears, he could not keep back, bedewed her hair. It was not a sight for other eyes, and I stole away to weep for very gladness.

I was still in my chamber, and hardly calm again, when a knock was heard at the door and Miss Janetta answered my bidding to enter.

"I looked in, on my way to bed, to inquire how Leah — how Mrs. Moore is now."

"Better," I replied. "Much better, we think, and, at last, quite sensible."

"You are then more hopeful as to her recovery?"

"We are — decidedly!"

She had declined my proffer of a seat, and now stood before the grate twisting her bracelet — her cousin's gift — until the soft flesh grew red beneath the friction and pressure.

"It is your design to leave us in a few days, is it not, Miss Allison? I believe I heard you say something of such an intention, this morning, to my cousin Charles."

"Yes. I must go very soon. I have lingered already longer than I expected to do when I came, on account of Leah's illness."

"You are an orphan like myself, unless I am mistaken?"

"I am."

She turned slowly towards me and fixed her keen eye upon mine.

"And this was, in your estimation, a sufficient reason for the

hatred you conceived against me before you had known me a day, which has manifested itself in innumerable persecutions ever since? ”

I answered, in astonishment, that I had never persecuted or interfered with her in the slightest degree.

She interrupted me. “ You have not scrupled to play the spy upon my actions, and to put the worst possible construction upon the most innocent of these ; to slander me to Mrs. Moore, and arouse against me her enmity also ; to sow the seeds of strife between husband and wife, and all that you might render this my only home, in the absence of my natural protector, as intolerable as it was once happy ! Oh, you have done a good work in these six weeks — one that you have cause to be proud of ! But I am not here to criminate, or to quarrel with you. I merely wished, as was but natural, to notify you of my purpose to thwart your righteous designs. So soon as Mrs. Moore is sufficiently strong to bear the excitement of the disclosure, I shall, in the presence of her husband, unravel the whole mystery of your iniquity ; right myself in her eyes or leave the house. Not even your machinations have shaken *his* faith in me. You had best make your foundations sure before you leave your dupe. I give you leave and notice to do this. I never fight in the dark — never stab in the back. God defend the right ! ”

“ Amen ! ” I returned, fervently. “ You ought to know, if you do not, Miss Dalrymple, that there is not one syllable of truth in all you have said. I have never acted the spy or informer with respect to yourself or any one else. If I have seen much in your conduct that appeared inexcusable, according to my ideas of right and honor, Mrs. Moore is none the wiser for these impressions and opinions. If she has witnessed yet more to grieve and displease her, she has been equally discreet towards me. I do not expect you to credit this — ”

She interrupted me again with her mocking, sneering smile — cool and deadly — the look poor Leah dreaded and disliked beyond expression.

“You are correct in the supposition. I see no necessity for a further interchange of compliments. We understand one another. I have the pleasure of bidding you good-night.”

Did I understand her? Had I then, or could I have any just conception of the motives, base and pitiful, that urged her to renewed efforts for the destruction of her unoffending victim's peace? And were this accomplished, finally and irretrievably, what possible benefit could accrue to herself from the consummate villany, beyond the gratification of a senseless vanity and petty revenge? If she indeed loved Charles Moore in an unlawful degree, if he were separated, divorced from his wife and free to seek his would-be charmer's hand, public scorn and reprobation would be their portion; respectful compassion surround Leah like a shield and halo. Was the girl mad, or dreaming? Silly or impetuous I knew she was not. She was safe in gratifying her spleen by the delivery of her denunciations against me to my face. I comprehended this, as she intended I should; knew that she appreciated my impotency as thoroughly as I did myself. Not to rescue my good name from universal ignominy would I have risked Leah's returning life and senses by ominous sign or speech. I must go and leave her in happy ignorance of the prepared mine; could only commit her to the Helper of the innocent, the Trust of the upright.

The evening before my departure I went to her room, at night-fall, to sit with her until tea-time. I had heard Mr. Moore leave her and run down stairs, then out of the house, but a moment before, and surmised correctly that he had gone to procure some newly-thought-of dainty, wherewith to tempt her slender and varying appetite. He was continually recollecting “just the thing” to please her palate and “bring up her

strength," and the result was a supply of delicacies, rare, rich, and delightful, that would have surfeited a well person. I moved quietly, not to disturb her, should she feel disposed to sleep, and when her weak, sweet voice broke the silence of the dim chamber, I supposed, for a minute, that she was speaking to me. The latter part of the sentence undeceived me. She was fondling the babe who lay upon her arm.

"We have had a dear, blessed visit from him this evening, haven't we, baby dear? Mamma thought once — yes, many times — that she would never be so full of peace and happiness again as she is now. We have won him back, my own heaven-sent blessing!"

By this time I had slipped out as noiselessly as I had entered.

I see that picture yet in my dreams, at times: the shaded bed, the faint, but expressive outline of the young mother's face bending lovingly down towards the infant; I hear the gentle tones, tremulous with joy as weakness, but I say no more to her hopeful asservation — "God grant it!" for mother and child seem always to be lying upon the crumbling verge of a precipice.

CHAPTER V.

ONE sultry August evening, seven months after my visit to the Moores, as my brother and myself were seated at our quiet tea-table, a servant brought the message that a lady wished to see me in the parlor.

"She came in a carriage, ma'am, and has a trunk," added the girl, following me into the hall. "And she seems very tired; had I better get her room ready?"

"By all means!" And anticipating a meeting with some cousin or aunt from a distance, I unclosed the parlor door.

A woman had sunk down into a large arm-chair, near the middle of the apartment, and upon her knees lay a child, apparently asleep. I had only time to make out this much in the dusk, when the drooping head of the weary-looking figure was lifted, and a voice, familiar in spite of its strained cadences, said with an outburst of hysterical laughter: "I have presented myself at your doors uninvited, you see!"

"Leah, my dear child! can this be you?" cried I, hurrying forward.

She laughed again. "I believe it is! I am not sure! He is asleep!" as I took the child from her lap. "I came off in such haste that I could not supply the place of his nurse, who is sick. Then, too, I wanted him all to myself for a little while, you know. I suppose they could take him from me as it is, couldn't they!"

"What an idea!" said I, cheerily, but with secret and grow-

ing uneasiness at her strange behavior. "Why, who would want him?"

"That is what I try to remember! Nobody would care to be troubled with the care of him, except the mother that bore him. And it does seem to me that mine is the best right. *She* never cared for children, and I hope he will let me keep my boy!"

"He is a noble fellow!" I responded, soothingly, while my heart throbbed so violently it seemed that it must awaken the little sleeper in my arms. "We will take him up to bed, and mamma must have a cup of tea immediately."

Chattering on about the heat of the day, the dust, my delight at seeing her — about everything that came into my head except the heavy, nameless fear that oppressed my spirit, I led the way to her chamber. There was a light there, and when I had deposited my burden upon the bed I went up to Leah, who stood by a window, and offered to remove her hat and mantle. Turning her wild eyes upon me, she whispered, motioning towards the servant who was unstrapping the trunk, "Send her out!" As the door shut behind the girl, Leah threw herself upon my neck — "Oh, Maria, will you let me stay here a little while, until I die?"

An alarming fit of hysterics succeeded. It was two hours later when, lying pale and exhausted upon her pillow, her hand clasped in mine, she told me the story of her sufferings since we parted.

Janetta had not carried out her threat of complaint against and exposure of my "machinations," in the hearing of both husband and wife. She had never attempted to traduce me to Leah, nor was her conduct, throughout the convalescence of the latter, in the slightest degree offensive. She was gentle, respectful, almost affectionate to the woman she had tried so hard to injure; accepted gracefully her secondary place in the

household. Her attentions transferred, for the most part, from the husband to the wife, were well-timed and skilful; her demeanor to Mr. Moore frank and free, kind and cousinly, yet evincing no desire for a prominent place in his regard, much less a monopoly of his affections. In the generosity of her lately-regained happiness, Leah was ready to consider much, if not all the misery of the past winter as the morbid dream of her imagination. Her husband had declared, in the most solemn terms, that she had misinterpreted many of his actions, and been misled by a diseased fancy in viewing others, and offered to renounce not only all intimacy but all intercourse beyond that of the coldest civility, with his cousin. To this Leah could not consent. It had never been her desire to interfere between him and his relatives. She felt real pity for the friendless girl, committed for a time to his guardianship, and expressed the wish that the mistakes and misunderstandings of the past should be forgotten, and the three form in future one united family. Nay, she went so far as to urge the propriety and kindness of this course upon Charles, when he hesitated to make the experiment, and doubted whether separation would not be best for all parties.

By imperceptible degrees affairs slid back into their old train. Janetta's manner lost its deference; covert taunts and open sneers, when Mr. Moore was not by, taking the place of the loving appeal and soft answer. Charles—never harsh or impatient in speech or look; generous to supply every expressed wish of his wife; watchful of her health and bodily comfort—nevertheless yielded, as formerly, to the exigent affection or vanity of his so-called sisterly kinswoman, and was, ere long, as thoroughly her slave as in the dark old days to which Leah had looked back with trembling; whose shadow, she began to feel, was stealing fast after the doubtful brightness of the present. It was harder to endure in silence, now, than

it had been then. Her illness had unhinged and enfeebled her nervous system. She was often irritable and peevish with her husband — conduct invariably regretted and apologized for by herself, and attributed by him to her health, when a more searching inquiry would have revealed to him a deeper cause in a tortured mind. Too proud to speak; ashamed to complain of the work whose beginning was apparently in her own imprudent confidence; aware, moreover, that such remonstrance would be met by the recapitulation of the license she had given, she resolved to bear on dumbly until the time for Mr. Dalrymple's return from abroad.

As if no drop were to be wanting in her cup of trial, there arrived by the steamer in which they had expected him to take passage a letter, announcing his intention of prolonging his stay until the autumn. His sister could either remain where she was, he wrote, or take up her abode for the summer in the family of another cousin, who resided in the western part of the State. It was like Janetta Dalrymple to put the letter and the question to be decided in Mr. Moore's hands, instead of settling the matter promptly for herself. She had less genuine self-respect than any other woman I ever knew. Of course Charles' inclination coincided with gallantry and hospitality in recommending her further sojourn under his roof. He was so incautious as to say as much to her before consulting Leah upon the subject, and was reminded sadly by his cousin that there might be an essential difference of opinion upon this point between the heads of the household. Thus artfully prepared to expect and resist an unreasonable show of opposition to his scheme, he sought his wife, and opened up the question in a tone that showed a foregone conclusion so arbitrary as to render the form of consultation a mockery. Her timid attempt at expostulation was met sternly, and her long and carefully repressed spirit arose in arms. She painted, with the burning

emphasis of truth and feeling, the neglect and insult which had been, and were daily her portion, meted out by the hands of husband and guest; sketched the probable end of the entanglement that was constantly binding him more tightly, and was already the theme of slanderers' tongues, and closed by declaring that, if he chose to retain Miss Dalrymple as a member of his family, she would herself seek some other abode.

"The time has come when you must choose between us!" were the words with which she quitted him.

How he broke the decision to Janetta she never inquired; but he informed her coldly the next day that she had written to engage board during the summer months with her distant cousin. The letter and its discussion were not named between Janetta and herself. In the process of time, the serpent in the house took her departure; and, in spite of her husband's lowering brow and marked depression of spirits, Leah breathed more freely. Strong in the might of her love, she believed that she could yet win him back; that, if the freshness and fervor of that early devotion, which is made up of faith and hope, were gone, there might still be in store for them a tranquil enjoyment of life, and the society of one another and their boy, that might take from memory its sting. After a time, the salutary effects of her endeavors after his comfort and pleasure began to be apparent. He recovered his cheerfulness; seemed satisfied and happy in her company, and there was, in the attentions he was never backward in rendering, an alacrity and soul whose lack she had felt most painfully while seeing them continually exhibited in his demeanor to another. If she suspected that he wrote regularly to his cousin, and received letters in return, she put the idea out of her mind as soon as possible, and concealed the hurt his silence upon this head caused her.

Four days ago, she went on to say, he had told her of im-

portant business which would call him away about the middle of the month, and might detain him from home for a fortnight or more. He proposed, thoughtfully and kindly as it seemed to her, that she should spend the time of his absence with me. Thanking him for this considerate attention to her wishes, she promised to think over the matter, and they separated for the day. Court was in session, and he had to hurry off to be at his post in season. As she was passing through the upper hall in the course of the forenoon, she chanced to espy a waste-paper basket, which the housemaid had brought down from her master's study and left unemptied until her work in the chambers should be done. Upon the top of the disorderly pile of torn manuscripts, old newspapers, etc., lay an unfolded sheet of letter-paper, white and smooth, and evidently recently written upon. By a mechanical impulse of carefulness, prompting her to see whether this might not have been added to the refuse by the servant's blunder, Leah picked it up and glanced over it.

Voice and strength failed her. She drew a crumpled paper from her travelling satchel — crumpled and worn as by numberless readings — and passed it to me; then turned her face to the wall. It was an unfinished letter from Charles Moore to Janetta Dalrymple.

“My own darling — my sweet Nettie,” was the beginning. The purport of the communication was that he had made his arrangements to join the travelling party which was to set out the next week for a fortnight's tour, and accepted, with eager pleasure, her invitation to become her especial escort.

“And I warn you, my pet, that I will brook no interference from the ‘handsome young collegian’ of whom you try to make me jealous — you witch! The thought of having you all to myself for two long weeks has almost set me crazy with joy. L. will probably pay Miss Allison a visit while we are

gone. "I say 'we' to you, not her. You and I, my poor darling, have suffered too intensely from her absurd jealousy and prejudices in times past for me to run the risk of provoking the sleeping demon by revealing the direction of my journey, or in what company it will be made. I have sacrificed my inclinations and happiness to her so often during the last year, that I am surely justifiable in seeking something like heart-pleasure now. I shall count the moments until we meet —"

Here the delectable effusion had stopped. The date was the very morning upon which Leah discovered the waif. He had undoubtedly forgotten it in his haste when he found that he was behind time. She told me briefly by and by, how she had heard him that evening inquiring of the servant whether she had taken a letter from his table, and blaming her, with unwonted harshness, for having, as she confessed, picked up one from the floor and put it among the waste matter, adding that it was well she had burned everything she had taken down, since there were papers in the basket he would not have meet other eyes for a thousand dollars. For two days she had to keep this terrible secret locked up in heart and brain; to act and speak as usual; to forego mourning over the love and hopes now indeed lost — buried forever; then she calmly kissed him "Farewell!" held up his boy for a parting caress; and, with tearless eyes, beheld him depart to happiness and her successful rival. Her own trunk was already packed, and she took the next train for the town in which was my home.

She poured out the story with a rapid incoherence that would have made me question the verity of certain portions, but for the unmistakable evidence of the letter. Smothering my indignation, I tried to persuade her to sleep, for her child's sake, if not her own.

"My boy! yes — I know! Put his cradle just here, where

I can lay my hand upon it, and be sure the door is locked, please! They may try to rob me of him! He is all they have left me — everything!”

The fearful misgiving awakened in my mind by her first burst of emotion was too true! Her sorrow and its unnatural suppression had affected her mind. In this persuasion, I made an excuse of her apprehensions on her babe's account to insist upon remaining with her all night. She accepted the offer thankfully, and with an effort at self-command, that reminded me of the Leah of other times — when I had darkened the room and lain down upon a lounge, as if for repose — she closed her eyes and tried to compose herself to slumber. She had rested thus but a few minutes, when a low laugh, so hollow and desolate in its meaning that it chilled my blood, came to my ears.

“Maria, they named me rightly, did they not? We could hardly have blamed Jacob, had he deserted Leah entirely for the better-beloved Rachel!”

I would that I could obliterate from my mind as I can keep from my readers' eyes the scenes of the week that followed. After that fearful laugh and the accompanying words, there gleamed not one ray of reason upon her fevered brain for seven weary days and nights. She did not recognize her idolized boy, and talked to me as to a stranger. Oh! the matchless tenderness — the depth of woe revealed by the ravings of those dreadful hours! Wronged! deceived! deserted! thus arose the climax of woes upon which she had pondered until she had gone mad — and what wonder?

My brother wrote and telegraphed in various directions for Mr. Moore. His partner in business had been furnished, as had Leah, also, before Charles left home, with the names of two or three places where communications would be likely to intercept him, and there had arrived two letters for Mrs. Moore

forwarded by the above-named gentleman to our address, but the postmarks upon these gave no additional clue to the wanderer's whereabouts, and, as we learned subsequently, none of our messages or notes reached him on the route.

Upon the eighth day, the sick woman awoke from sleep, sensible, calm — dying!

“I have dreamed of my mother, Maria!” she whispered, a smile of holy peace illumining her wan features. “Do you remember those words: ‘As one whom *his mother* comforteth?’ I do not die alone while you and she are here — and there is One nearer and dearer yet!”

The eyes, large and lustrous, looked steadfastly upwards; the lips moved without sound. There was no need of audible language in that communion! Then she asked for her babe, and, while he laughed in her face and cooed his gladness at seeing her again, she laid her hand upon his head and breathed a blessing.

“But for him, death would be all sweetness. As it is, I find it very easy!”

Even in that awful hour, my thoughts ran swiftly back to another night — three short years before — when her full, happy tones had sunk with the weight of what I now read as fulfilled prophecy.

“God knows how constant and earnest is my prayer that I may make him as happy as he deserves to be! If the power is denied me, I shall find death very sweet!”

Oh, my poor, poor friend! She had not to wait long for the welcome guest, and his coming was painless as peaceful. Her last words were, “Give my love to Charles!” Of his infidelity and Janetta's vile treachery, she did not once speak. Already, before the weary sank to rest, the wicked had ceased to trouble her. At that very moment, according to the testimony of a member of the travelling party, Charles Moore was

waltzing with Janetta Dalrymple in the ballroom of a fashionable watering-place.

When he came to us, frenzied by the tidings that had met him upon his return to his home, his wife had slept in the grave for three days. I concealed nothing from him. I could not feel that he deserved mercy at my hands, although it was plain that his heart's blood welled at every stab. It was impossible for him to suffer as he had made her do, I reasoned savagely, yet half terrified at the sight of his horror of remorse.

"For pity's sake, no more!" he groaned, at last. "You will kill me! My poor girl! Heaven is my witness that I did love her to the end! I never dreamed of wronging her! If she had lived I could have explained everything!"

How, he did not say, nor did I care to inquire; but I imagine that he would have attempted a repetition of the arguments and assertions that had brought balm to her wounded spirit upon a former occasion. I suppose he assuaged his torn conscience with these; purchased from it rest and forgiveness, as he would have hoped to buy hers, had she survived the blow he had dealt her, for he wedded Janetta Dalrymple in less than eighteen months afterwards.

I am thankful that, before this event took place, the sinless babe was gathered to his mother's arms, perhaps in answer to that mother's prayers. I am glad in the thought that in that high home of perfect peace, no knowledge or memory is permitted to enter that could mar the serenity of the tried and faithful, of whom the world was not worthy.

They say that Mr. Moore lives happily with his new wife, and it may be so. Justice and judgment are not of this life. I knew that when Leah died!

HOMESPUN AND VELVET.

CHAPTER I.

"I WISH I could preach as I would wish to young people upon the evils of premature engagements," said Mr. Coleman, earnestly.

"Suppose you begin with the present audience; or does your philanthropy disdain so limited a sphere?" suggested a young man, who, with a lady, composed said "audience."

The elderly gentleman smiled quizzically beneath his spectacles. "What if I were to say that I do not consider either of you in danger of entering too early into such obligations? that, speaking plainly, I regard you as having attained unto the age of discretion? Ungallant — am I not, Kate?" — tapping her on the head.

She answered the smile with one as free from embarrassment as his was from malicious meaning.

"I forgive you, sir, for my share of reproach, since you do not hint that I have gained the age without the discretion, or insinuate the rarity of temptations to commit the rashness you condemn. But what has given occasion for this outbreak of desire to lecture upon early betrothals?"

"Nothing in our conversation, certainly," said the young man. "We were speaking of Mr. Cameron's arrival at the — Hotel, and the public reception in contemplation among our citizens."

"I saw him a moment to-day," returned Mr. Coleman. "He has grown old rapidly since our last meeting. I have known him for years ; indeed, we were college-mates ! Poor fellow !"

"In what does he call for your pity ?" questioned Kate. "Is his domestic life unhappy ?"

"As unhappy as his public career is brilliant — as miserable as the whimsical exactions of a peevish, sickly woman can render it — as burdensome as the companionship of a badly educated, narrow-minded wife can make matrimonial shackles."

"Uncle, how unkind ! Do you know the lady ?"

"I have seen her in her own house, where she was unamiable and slatternly — in society, where she strove to play the agreeable. Silly she was everywhere."

"I am surprised ! Why did he marry her ? What could have attracted him ?"

"It is the same old story. You have heard it a hundred times of other men as high in intellect, and in standing as distinguished — a college love-affair, a match made by propinquity, which brings about more marriages than harmony of sentiment, personal charms, or mercenary motives. He was at the age when courting 'comes easy,' is almost a necessity to a youth imaginative and affectionate as he was. He boarded with her widowed mother. The daughter was reasonably good-looking, and eighteen. The result might have been foreseen. They were married at the conclusion of his course. Now — heigh-ho !"

"Perhaps he does not feel her deficiencies," Kate said, gently. "He is accustomed to her peculiarities ; and they are doubtless less offensive to him than to strangers. If he is really attached to her, he is willing to overlook whatever is objectionable in manner or mind."

"A husband does get used to foibles," answered her uncle. "Faults, love overlooks and forgives. Neither habit nor love can ever reconcile him to utter dissimilarity of character and

taste. Cameron committed a fatal error — fatal to his happiness, ruinous to his peace of mind. It is a pity, a sad pity ! ”

The third person of the little group was toying with a spool of silk, abstracted from Kate Dinmore’s work-basket. He unwound and rewound the shining thread with an appearance of great carelessness, and did not raise his eyes to Mr. Coleman’s face, as he said : “ The perfectly paired are then the only people who are happy in wedlock, according to your ideas, sir ? The odds are frightful that not one couple in a thousand will reach your standard.”

“ I said nothing of perfection, Harry. I would, however, have a man who thinks seriously of matrimony satisfy himself by strict examination, and every test that is within his reach, that his heart is filled, from its lowest depth to its brim, by the object of his choice. Especially would I have him try this choice by a ripe judgment. In these affairs, the sometimes excellent maxim, ‘ Let well enough alone,’ is pernicious in the highest degree. It sickens me,” continued the old gentleman, rising, and walking the floor, “ to see men select wives, and worse still, women select husbands, with less care and thought than the one would manifest in the purchase of a horse, or the other of a silk robe. If the private records of the households thus formed could be exposed for the benefit of the giddy creatures pressing on in their footsteps, the road would be less thronged. How few realize that the contract formed — after half a dozen weeks, it may be days of acquaintanceship — is for life ! that the vows assumed in the flush of admiration for a pretty face or engaging demeanor, or nonchalantly spoken upon the ‘ well-enough ’ system, can be annulled only by death ! Wretched homes, hollow faith, empty hearts — if they could but look forward to these ! ”

“ You are excited, uncle ! ” remonstrated Kate, winningly, laying her hand on his arm, and checking him as he passed

her. "We feel compassion for Mr. Cameron, not in the same measure with yourself, perhaps; but why need we or you bemoan what cannot be helped? We have no sad memories of disappointed hopes and lonely heartedness to brood over, and trust in Providence and our own right feeling to keep us from such a deplorable lifetime mistake."

He stood on the rug, looking gloomily into the grate. "A lifetime mistake! that is the term! a mistake whose consequences are the same as if it had been a sin instead." He resumed his seat, still holding the hand of his favorite niece. She exchanged a glance of mingled curiosity and uneasiness with her other companion. This clouded mood was most unusual with the sunny-tempered old man. Somewhat eccentric he was, and a free, earnest speaker of opinion and feeling, but rarely melancholy — never morose. "Kate," he recommenced, softly, his eyes fixed, as in reverie, upon the red coals, "did I tell you — did your mother remember that this is an anniversary with me — my wedding-day?"

"No, sir."

She was grave, for his wife had slept the long sleep for many years. He was a childless man and a solitary one, but for the society of his sister's family, whose home he could not be prevailed upon to make his own.

"I am sixty years old. Thirty-seven years ago to-night I was married. You have heard your parents speak of my wife — and you, too, Harry, for your father and mother knew her well."

"They have described her to me as very lovely in person and disposition," replied Harry, with respectful tenderness.

"She was! she was! If she had a fault, I never discovered it. Beautiful in person, ingenuous in character, amiable and guileless as a child! She was a child, nothing more. I knew her to be pure and excellent, too good for me; yet —

with shame I own it — when I placed the wedding-ring upon her finger, when I spoke the words that made her mine, I also knew, felt in my inmost soul, that she was not the other self Providence had formed for me ; that, however closely our hands might be joined, our hearts were yet two, not the blissful, beautiful one the Creator had ordered the twain to become ere pronouncing the solemn form. We had been acquainted but a month when we were betrothed. Our engagement lasted two years. Our residences were too far apart to allow me to pay her more than four visits a year ; but at each of these I discerned more clearly, first with wonder, finally with an indescribable sinking of spirit, the want of congeniality in our natures, the narrowing of the common ground upon which we could meet. I strove to interest her in my aims and hopes in life, the principles that conducted, the aspirations that nerved me. I sketched our future, in the working out of which bright consummation I craved her aid, her sympathy, her counsel. Not a chord thrilled at my touch. Her love was childlike and absolute, her dependence unquestioning. What I told her, she adopted as true, with as little thought as suspicion. For some, to many men, she would have been the impersonation of the ideal perfect wife. I was young, impatient, ambitious, and — I must say it — selfishly unreasonable. Indifferent to most of my schemes — indifferent because she did not understand their bearing, or appreciate my interest in them — plastic as wax to my hand though she was, she would never, I discovered, realize my hope of a helpmate. I must think, feel, act alone. Bitterly have I understood since how slight was the value I then set upon the priceless virtues that adorned the character seemingly so tame. I misjudged the worth to me of her singleness of devotion, her never-failing labors for my outward comfort, her patient sweetness of temper, things for which Cameron would barter fame and wealth. I loved no one be-

sides her. Thank Heaven, I was guiltless thus far! My heart was empty when I took my wife to my home; and if she failed to fill it, no intruder ever invaded the precincts she believed sacred to herself."

"She never knew, then!" interrupted Kate, eagerly. "Oh, I am glad!" Her cheek burned; her eyes were tearful.

"No! for ten years, we lived, and not unhappily, together. I had wronged, had cheated her, as I soon saw when the reserve of the girl gave place to the gentle fondness of the wife—always evident, never obtrusive. I stood appalled at the act I had committed. *Honor* had urged me to the redemption of my pledged word. In the name of honor, I had perjured myself to Heaven and to her; had deceived her who I vowed should be the sharer of every thought, beloved and cherished as my own life. Humanity and a sense of her right constrained me to keep up the delusion. In plain terms, I must break her heart or live a lie! As I have said, for ten years the false show beguiled even her eyes of affection. Not a syllable of altercation, not a cold tone was ever exchanged between us. If she had an ungratified wish, it was because she failed to express it in my hearing. With her last breath, she blessed me as 'the fondest and truest of husbands.' The dying hour is an honest time, I have heard, for the spirit that departs and those who receive its farewells; but I did not undeceive her. In another world, I would fain hope that infinite goodness and love withhold from her knowledge which compassion and justice prevented me from imparting here."

There was a pause. Kate's face was averted, but glistening pearls fell unheeded into her lap. Harry Eldredge had reeled off all the silk from the spool, and was knotting it into tangled meshes. At length, he broke the silence.

"Yet, according to your own confession, you were not unhappy, sir. May it not be true that, during those years of quiet

contentment, you knew as much of enjoyment, more of peace, than you would have had in a so-called 'love-match?' You were disappointed in the picture of wedded felicity your boyish imagination had painted; but were there not as few shades in the actual scene?"

"Did I say that I was happy? I think you misunderstood me, Harry."

"He did!" Kate interposed, without looking up. "You said, or meant to say, that your union, in itself, was not one of wretchedness. I can understand how an unsatisfied heart must ever be restless, schooled and kept down though it may be."

"You surely would not have had your uncle act differently, Miss Kate?"

The speech was sudden, with a touch of indignation in it.

"I do not know; I cannot decide," said the girl, sadly and slowly. "He adopted his course conscientiously; he had his reward in his conscience and in his wife's dying testimony to his persistence in this line of duty. But"—and here she lifted her head, a scarlet flush on her brow and a flash in her humid eyes—"I feel that if I had been in *her* place I should have detected the truth, consummate as his acting may have been. Forgive me, uncle, but you have always urged me to speak plainly, and to-night have set me the example. My husband could never have blinded me—deceived my instinct; and my sole reproach to him, upon the discovery of the terrible truth, would have been that he had not told me all before the irrevocable step was taken—all, his self-deception at the first, or his changed affection, whichever had brought about this state of affairs. I hold the letter of an engagement lighter than the lightest air, if the spirit be wanting. From the letter of a loveless marriage, there is no release." She looked timidly in the sorrowful countenance of her uncle, to the stern, settled features of his friend, and added, hesitatingly: "This,

however, is what my feeling, not my judgment, says — what would be *my* action — not the recommendation of a general principle.”

“And, in like manner, must every one decide in his or her peculiar case,” Mr. Coleman said, throwing off his meditative air, and speaking in his accustomed firm accents. “With such bitterness as these heart-trials bring, the stranger should not intermeddle. One thing is certain: the main fault, the undoubted false step lay back of all the years of which I have spoken. The wrong starting-point was the hasty engagement.”

“Yours is a sad history,” observed young Eldredge. “I cannot agree with you, however, in thinking it a common case. Why should it be?”

“Why, indeed,” echoed Mr. Coleman, “unless that youth is apt to mistake fancy for feeling, impulse for judgment? Believe me, Harry, men do not generally tell of such disappointments, and women sedulously shield from public gaze everything that could betray the woful shipwreck of love and hope. Candor, such as I have displayed to-night, is seldom met with, or you would soon learn your error in believing my experience singular. Look into these matters for yourself, my boy! I have turned out my heart-lining for you — why, I cannot exactly say. It is not often that I am confidential upon this subject. I never said so much before to living man or woman; but you two are my children, as it were, and a certain inward tempter has led me on, perhaps too far. Maybe, Harry,” with an effort of playfulness, “I have heard some ominous whispers touching your visits to that Happy Valley beyond the mountains. Look before you leap; and, having looked and determined upon the venture, may safety and happiness attend you!”

“Thank you, sir.”

The laugh that attended the brief sentence was short and forced.

“And as for you, Katy,” caressingly, “forget your uncle’s sober story, and smile for me once more before I go. My love to your mother; I am sorry her headache has kept her in her room this evening. Take care of her, my dear, and don’t be in too great a hurry to quit her, if you *have* reached the age of discretion.”

He kissed the saucily pouting lips, and received from her his hat and cane. Harry Eldredge likewise arose to go.

“It is not late,” Mr. Coleman remarked, in some surprise. “Do not let me hasten your movements.”

“I cannot stay longer, sir, much as I would like to prolong my visit. There are letters which must be written before I rest to-night.”

“Does the Happy Valley mail go out to-morrow?” asked the senior.

Again Harry colored and tried to laugh. There was a gleam of pleasantry in Kate’s face, yet she looked sorry at his early departure. A perception of this feeling on her part had nearly made him resign his purpose; but resisting the temptation by a resolute effort, he left the house with her uncle. The paths of the two parted ere long. The elder held on his deliberate way down the quiet street, whereupon stood his residence; the younger quickened his gait at the instant of their separation. Faster and faster rang his iron heel upon the pavement, as urged to speed by impatience or necessity. Arrived at his lodgings, he went up the stairs three at a bound, to his own room. The lamp, when lighted, revealed a pale countenance, which care had touched since the “good-night” was said at Mrs. Dinmore’s door. He cast aside his hat, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

“Let me think,” he said, half aloud; — “if I can!”

A turn or two through the chamber seemed to prepare him for reflection. He seated himself at the table, and drew from

a portfolio an unfinished letter. It was read over with more thought than had been expended in its composition, then put, almost tossed down, with a sigh. An hour of deep and painful musing followed. At its close, the thousand warring emotions that had striven together upon his face were banished by an expression of determination the most daring would have shrunk from opposing — a look that succeeded the signs of mental disquiet like the clearing-up of a December storm, when, through the widening rifts of cloud-banks, appears the hard gray-blue of the winter sky, more threatening and pitiless than the tempest. Drawing towards him the rejected sheet, he began to write out a conclusion. No love-letter was ever transcribed with such even pulses as beat in the wrist that upheld the pen. The stony repose of feature remained unaltered to the close; yet the subject would carry excitement to the far-off reader for whom the epistle was designed. It was one which is rarely named by those personally interested in it, without stirring emotion. There were here and there phrases of endearment, and these, too, were set down with mechanical regularity — conscientiously, one might have said — as if the writer were bent upon the fulfilment of the self-imposed duty in all its minutiae and to the utmost.

Thus read the addenda to the document, incomplete at his entrance: —

“And now, my dear Mildred, do not be startled at my approach to a topic which vitally concerns us both. The thought of our union should, by this time, have become too familiar to us for the mention of it to agitate either. But, hitherto, we have viewed it as a distant event, as a promise, rather than a coming, a nearing reality. The time has at length arrived for more practical consideration. I have turned the matter over and over in my mind with regard to its bearing upon my other relations in life, my business prospects, etc., and have come to

the settled conclusion that the period of my probation should be almost at an end, that there is no visible obstacle to our speedy marriage. I would not appear arbitrary in my avowal of this opinion and my inevitable desire that the necessary arrangements should be instantly commenced. But have you not, my dearest girl, given over to me the right to judge when will be the fittest season for the fruition of this long-cherished hope? Your conduct has been beyond praise, equally removed from prudish affectation and the impatience which is the offspring of distrust. Two years ago, you frankly acknowledged, in reply to my questionings, that you were ready to seal the compact we entered into when we were yet girl and boy. It has assumed a more solemn and binding form since that early plighting; but I have faith in you to believe that your constancy has kept pace with your sense of the importance of the pledges then given. I know you to be true as steel. Not a syllable of doubt, not an upbraiding sentence has ever passed from you to me; while I have often appeared inconsistent and petulant. May my heart cease to beat before I slight your fidelity, or prove ungrateful for your love!

“But it is with facts, more than with sentiment, that I must deal to-night. Your preparations — so you once informed me — would not occupy much time. Neither will mine. Write as soon as you can after the receipt of this, and state the *earliest* day on which you can leave your present home for that which I hope to have ready for you in due time, however soon that happy time may be.”

“How cold and business-like!” exclaims a fair reader, who treasures, in a jealously locked drawer, a ribbon-bound packet of letters, whose bulk is increased every few days by corpulent envelopes, all bearing the same handwriting.

“Very proper and sensible!” pronounces Miss Prim; “so different from the love-sick flummery girls are fed upon now-

a-days, *until they are married!* then —” A shrug and an acid smile finish the sentence.

The epistle, folded, sealed, and directed, lay on the table. Harry leaned back in his chair, and looked at it. It was assuredly not the novelty of the address that attracted his gaze, for he had written it at least once every week for three years.

Mildred Farrar's parents were near and intimate neighbors of the Eldredges; and the companionship of the young people, during Harry's summer vacations, was a thing of course. He had just turned his twenty-first year, and completed one session of his legal studies, when an attack of fever converted this usual season of enjoyment into one of suffering and languishing. The fury of the disease expended its force in a short time; but it left him in a state of deplorable weakness, condemned to a slow and discouraging convalescence. It was esteemed by all a happy chance that made Mildred the guest of Mrs. Eldredge through the weary weeks that must otherwise have seemed endless in their tedium to the invalid. Mr. and Mrs. Farrar were absent upon a visit to some distant relatives; and their daughter was left in the indulgent charge of their friendly neighbor. Harry wrote truth when he spoke of his *fiancée's* freedom from affectation. In the care she gradually came to exercise over him, the thousand attentions she rendered so quietly and delicately that only the recipient was aware of half he owed her, there was such singleness of desire for his comfort, so much unconscious self-denial, that he was won to gratitude, then to admiration, then to a warmer, stronger feeling, which, according to his reasoning, could be nothing but love. He was in the heyday season of waking dreams; and among the many ambitious prospects hung in the picture-gallery of his imagination was an unpretending domestic scene, dearer than all the rest, a sketch of the home which was to be his, and the presence that should fill it with beauty and affec-

tion. He could not have told when or how the veil dropped from the features of his incognita, when his household divinity stepped from her pedestal, and sat down, the woman and the wife, beside his hearth-stone. The revelation was not sudden, for he did not start when he found himself associating his nurse with every vision of the future, following her movements with an eye that bespoke something of a proprietor's interest in all she said and did. Hers was the lightest step about his couch — hers the most dexterous hand to smooth his pillows, or prepare refreshment, or adjust the furniture according to his capricious taste — hers the sweetest voice that, in conversation, reading, and song, invoked ease and slumber. As the day of parting drew near, the thought of his solitary city-lodging filled him with dread. Still beset by the nervous fancies of sickness, he persuaded himself and Mildred that it would be the most comfortless of earthly habitations, if unblessed by the ray of hope which she alone could shed upon the darkness — the anticipation of another abode which she should christen "home" for the lonely man. They parted — plighted lovers — the one to engage in a hand-to-hand strife with the world, and, in conquering, to gain character and manliness, the knowledge of people and things as they are, to cultivate the talents that promised him the eminence he craved, and the tastes that brought delight to himself, and distinction for him in the eyes of others; while she, remaining in her original obscurity, ignorant of his aims and her own deficiencies, changed in nothing from the girl he had wooed that idle, dreaming summer.

It was, in brief, as Mr. Coleman would have said, "the same old story," one which is repeated so often in our ears, acted so continually before our eyes, that few, save those who have borne some share of the suffering ever interwoven with the drama, heed its sadly warning moral, "A mistake for a

lifetime!" I know, as I write the words, that my pen probes many sore and aching hearts — pierces the crust of indifference to the hidden fester that makes all within to be shunned as hateful — strikes, like steel from flint, the telltale spark from petrifications that were hearts once, hearts that throbbed, burned, bled, grew chill and numb, and froze into stone.

Harry had disciplined his well; curbing fancy, and turning a deaf ear to a regretful murmur, that sounded oftenest and most mournfully through his soul when he was at Mildred's side, or read her letters. His rigid notions of duty and honor were stalwart supporters of his constancy; nor was there wanting a species of philosophy, convenient and fashionable, which sneered down Utopian ideas of wedded felicity, oneness of spirit and heart, and lowered the standard of wifely perfection to suit circumstances. Mr. Coleman's story had called the insurgent principles, for the first time, into the open field. We have seen with what stringency of action, what boldness of manœuvre, their march was arrested. But a partial reaction succeeded this unmerciful measure. Tender recollections, anguish unavailing, contended with the stern officer, Duty.

Mildred's miniature was worn habitually about his person. He took it now from its hiding-place, and laid it, side by side, upon the table, with an exquisite engraving he had purchased a few days before — he hardly acknowledged why, even to himself, nor what caused him to put it away with such care in a secret compartment of his portfolio, instead of leaving it exposed to the gaze of any chance visitor. He knew, now, saw and understood the motive which had tempted him to make himself its possessor, and to guard it from profane eyes. A wonderfully accurate likeness of Kate Dinmore looked up at him from the paper. The arch mouth, the full, eloquent eyes, the air of spirited intelligence, softened by native sweetness of temper and the practice of whatever is lovely in womanhood —

these could not have been more faithfully copied had she sat for the picture which purported to be a fancy sketch. As Harry studied it, it took, to his sight, a new expression, that of half pain, half wonder that had embarrassed her smile as he announced his intention of concluding, at so early an hour, his visit of that evening. For a moment, Memory was traitorous to Duty's trust. Glancing backward, he gathered many similar evidences of pleasure in his society, some more marked than this transient but unmistakable token — remembered how they had never been strangers to each other, but friends from their earliest meeting — how their sympathies and opinions, if not always in unison, had invariably harmonized — how every interview had drawn him nearer to her, revealed new beauties in mind and disposition.

“Do you love her, then?” demanded Conscience.

“No!” he answered, aloud; “but” — and he set his teeth upon his under lip, and spoke through them — “I could have done it! loved her, oh, so much more —”

He grasped the engraving, made as though he would have pressed it to his lips, but restrained the impulse, and, with an unshaking hand, held it in the flame of the lamp. A quick blaze, a shuddering and shrivelling of the burnt paper, and the ashes dropped thickly upon the miniature beneath.

CHAPTER II.

MRS. HARRY ELDREDGE'S appearance in the society of which her husband was a popular member was looked for with interest and curiosity. Mrs. Dinmore gave her the introductory party.

"Have you seen the bride yet, Kate?" asked Elvira Moseley, a lively rattle. "But I suppose you have, as you and Mr. Eldredge are such intimate friends. She was out when I called. What is she like? Is she pretty, sensible, agreeable? Do tell me! I am devoured by the desire to see something of the unknown enchantress who has borne off the prize for which we have been pulling caps these two years past.

'We sadly think, as we stand about,
With spite and envy dying,
How the merest stranger has cut us out,
With only half our trying.'

Do enlighten me, Kate!"

"I have been waiting a quarter of an hour for an opportunity to do so," answered Kate, smiling. "Let me see if I can reply, in the right order, to your queries. I *have* seen the bride. She *was* in when I paid my visit. She is pleasant in face and manner, and, so far as I could judge, in the course of our short conversation, not deficient in sense. She may be the 'merest stranger' to us, but Mr. Eldredge has known her a long time; they have been engaged for nearly four years."

"Indeed! The wicked flirt! not to have told us, all the while we were breaking our hearts and losing other chances almost, if not quite, as eligible, in the hope of securing him! *Parlez du* — no matter whom — but see him! or *them*, as I must learn to say, I suppose. O dear!"

Mr. Coleman stood by his sister, as the newly-married pair paid their respects; and to him Harry next presented his wife.

"You must allow the privilege of a familiar friend, my dear madam," said the old gentleman, kindly, holding out his hand. "I want to prove to you, moreover, that I entertain no grudge towards you for having robbed me of the society of my favorite companion."

Mrs. Eldredge smiled and looked at her husband. He waited an instant, in the hope, it would seem, that she would reply to the salutation herself, then responded for her: "She is as innocent of the intent to rob as of the deed, sir. You shall not shake me off so easily; you will still see more of me than you wish, I am afraid." And they passed on.

A while later, Mr. Coleman was again in their vicinity, not accidentally, but through desire to see and know more of the object of his friend's choice. She was just then engaged by Mrs. Moultrie, a lady whom Harry particularly liked and admired, but whom he appeared now to avoid. This inclination she thwarted by stepping into his path, and confronting him with a congratulatory smile and a word of welcome. She said some pleasant phrase to Mrs. Eldredge, as they were introduced, and received, as Mr. Coleman had done, a smile of pleasure. Mrs. Moultrie persevered. She spoke of the native valley of the bride, well known to her by the reports of admiring tourists, and which she had once seen with her own eyes, many years before.

"A great many improvements are going on there now," remarked Mrs. Eldredge. "There is some talk of running a

railroad through it. The surveyors have been at work in the mountains for I don't know how long."

"It is almost a pity — is it not?" said Mrs. Moultrie. "Think of the steam-whistle piercing the stillness of those grand solitudes! And, instead of enjoying the prospect from the summit, I suppose we are to be whirled through a dark, stifling tunnel, cut in the very heart of the mountain."

"I hope they will conclude to lay the track, and make haste about it," returned Mrs. Eldredge. "There will be a beautiful view of the cars from my father's house, and I can get there so easily!"

"We trust, in time, to lessen the weight of that consideration," smiled Mrs. Moultrie. "We will do our best to reconcile you to your new residence; or, are your rural tastes so confirmed that you cannot tolerate city life?"

"I don't know much about town; I never was here but once before," answered the bride. "I get along pretty well, only I can't drink the water, and I didn't fancy the milk at the boarding-house. I have heard that the city milk is nothing but chalk and water."

"This inoffensive, quiet place of ours is often styled a moral Sahara by country-bred misanthropes," interrupted Harry, with an effort at easy gayety. "You perceive that Mrs. Eldredge considers it as a desert in another sense, Mrs. Moultrie."

"Come and see me frequently, Mrs. Eldredge," pursued that lady; "I live almost in the country — quite upon the outskirts of this thirsty land. You shall have clear well-water and real milk in abundance."

With an injunction to Harry to bring his wife to visit her very soon, she was turning away, when Mrs. Dinmore approached.

"You are a musician, I am sure, Mrs. Eldredge. Mr. Eldredge's love and taste for music are a guarantee of your skill.

I have heard that you used to sing away pain and weariness from him, in that most fortunate sickness of his. You see, I have heard one early chapter of your romance."

Mildred colored high. "I do not play at all, ma'am. I took lessons when I was at school, but I have not touched a piano for eighteen months and more."

Mrs. Moultrie, and even the less critical hostess, misinterpreted the confusion apparent throughout this speech. The shyness with which the young wife shrank from the jesting allusion to the courtship she had been taught to regard as a thing not to be talked of in general company was, to the polished dames, mere *gaucherie*, or the shame she felt in confessing her inability to comply with the request made of her.

"Commonplace in person and mind; destitute of grace of manner; without accomplishments; not wealthy; — why did he marry her?" was Mrs. Moultrie's mental comment, as she mingled with the crowd.

Had it been repeated aloud to the bridegroom, he would not have felt more certain as to her judgment.

Mr. Coleman, too, had been an auditor of the above conversation, and had now withdrawn to a little distance, although his design had plainly been to join the young couple. Harry's cheeks tingled with mortification at the suggestion of his sensitive pride, that the practised eye of his Mentor had already divined the true state of the case. A riddle the match might be to others besides Mrs. Moultrie; but, in the involuntary shake of his head, in the sympathy expressed by Mr. Coleman's benevolent features, the conscious husband saw that this union was classified — recalled the despairing emphasis with which he had said of another's domestic infelicity: "The same old story," and "a mistake for a lifetime." He had never spent a more uncomfortable evening; his irritation found fresh goads at every step. He was annoyed if his wife failed to

talk, as she often did, when she could not, so to speak, find anything in the remarks addressed to her to hang a reply upon. Of the art of small talk she was absolutely ignorant; badinage and repartee were terms as strange to her as their practice would have been difficult. When she did speak, his vexation was in no wise abated by nervousness lest she should commit some gross offence against custom or good taste, and the necessity this imposed upon him to watch for these transgressions, and cover them as dexterously as he could. There are certain tones and inflections of voice, acquired insensibly, rather than studied, by persons of education and refinement, which are not to be mistaken by the initiated, and are noticeable in the briefest sentence. On the other hand, who does not recognize the truth that the uncultivated accents, the provincialisms of the illiterate or careless stamp him as such, ere he can articulate half a dozen words? Mildred was not illiterate in the ordinary acceptance of the word, but she was provincial, and her range of thought had hitherto been as limited as her experience. It may have been a false shame that caused Harry to grow hot and cold by turns; made his laugh to tremble and his forehead become damp with the sweat of agony, a hundred times in the course of the few hours passed in that brilliant throng; but if so, the keenness of the suffering was some atonement for its folly.

"You look very tired," said Mildred, going up to him, after they reached home, and putting back the hair from his face.

"I *am* tired," he responded, moodily. "These parties are stupid affairs. I do not care if I never go to another."

"Don't you?" — joyfully. "I never enjoy them; but I fancied that you were fond of going into society."

"I used to be —" He stopped, and added, with more consideration for her feelings than would have appeared in the remainder of the sentence as he had first framed it: "The

truth is, Milly, I find myself more willing to stay at home, now that I have a house of my own. There is no need to seek comfort abroad."

"We have indeed a comfortable establishment," said the matter-of-fact bride, with a satisfied survey of the well-furnished room. "It will be such a pleasure to me to keep it in order. There is nothing I love so much as housekeeping."

Harry was silent. His humor just then did not dispose him to look upon excellent housewifery as the chief qualification to be desired in his partner for life.

Mildred continued: "I went over your trunk and drawers, to-day, while you were down town, and could not help laughing at the queer mixture in them. I don't think your bump of order can be very large."

"Maybe not," he replied, listlessly, swallowing a yawn.

"There were a dozen pairs of socks that needed mending, and eight more odd ones tossing about. What has become of the fellows, do you suppose? Is your washerwoman honest?"

"I believe so. The socks are lost, I imagine. Throw the others away. Do not trouble yourself with them."

"It is no trouble. I like to take care of your things. Mending is fine work for the evenings; and I have enough to last a long while. You know I have no sewing of my own on hand. My wedding outfit will prevent my wanting anything else this winter. I am sure I had rather stay at home and sew, than attend these tiresome parties. I must say, Harry" — with a laugh — "that I do not feel at ease in the company of your grand acquaintances. They are too fashionable for me. I am so much afraid that I will say or do something wrong."

"There is no necessity for such a dread. It only increases your discomfort, and makes you more liable to blunders."

"I can't help it. I have never been used to gay society,

and have no taste for it. There is so little sincerity among these people !”

“How do you know ?” was questioned shortly.

“Why, I have seen — that is, I have always heard that men and women of the world are not to be trusted ; and they seem so artificial to me, are so devoted to dress and style, talk in such a highflown strain, and are so ceremonious, that, as I said, they make me uncomfortable.”

“You are prejudiced,” Harry trusted himself to say. “The opinion is prevalent throughout the country that women who live in cities are bound to become frivolous and heartless — the men hard and selfish. For my part, I have never met with warmer hearts and more disinterested kindness anywhere than I have known and received from the very friends you stigmatize as insincere —”

“There ! there ! you are getting excited ! We will let the matter pass. I believe them to be whatever you say they are, and am sorry I was so uncharitable. I did not mean to wound you, Harry dear.”

Mildred was undoubtedly amiable. She had little tact, a want that bordered upon obtuseness ; but she bore the consequences of her indiscretion with unruffled good-humor. She was patient and willing, moreover ; and Harry conceived a bright plan ; he would mould her into some semblance of his ideal wife, would train her tastes into congeniality with his. Without realizing what she did, she agreed to his projected course of study and polish. If she sighed at having to lay aside the beloved mending and the piece-basket during such of the long winter evenings as they passed at home, the sigh never reached his ear ; and the smile with which she listened to his readings and remarks thereupon, the attention she yielded as he designated what portions of the text-book he wished her to study the following day, were to him an augury of success.

The ground received the seed. It was beyond his power to cause it to spring up and bring forth. Her memory was a faithful machine. The tasks he set were duly conned and recited, with, perhaps, secret wonderment that she, a married woman, should be required to "learn lessons" like any school-girl; but "Harry wished it;" and whim though she might think it, his whims had more weight with her than the most cogent reasonings of others. She tried hard to look delighted when he bought a handsome piano of fine tone as a Christmas gift for her, and informed her that he had engaged the best music-teacher in the city to give her instruction in the long-neglected art. She meditated the propriety of expostulation upon these extravagant expenditures for her gratification; but she felt that somehow it would not be agreeable to him were she to avow how much greater pleasure the same amount of money would have brought her, had it been applied to the purchase of furniture or a carriage. For dress, she cared comparatively little; and here, also, she fell short of her husband's model. He had an eye for the beautiful and becoming in female attire; and Mildred's carelessness on this head more than annoyed, often provoked him, the more as he felt his inability to instruct her as to what items of costume made up the general effect he admired. More than once, he actually took an inventory of a particular dress of Kate Dinmore, or some other lady of approved taste, and insisted, without saying why, that his wife should procure such and such materials, and have them fashioned after a certain style; but, despite her literal obedience, the result was so often a burlesque, sometimes so nearly grotesque, that he had no inclination to persist in the experiment. The resolution to eschew parties was more easily formed than carried into execution. Invitations were constantly pouring in upon the rising young lawyer, which it was neither polite nor politic to decline. While the prosecution of his scheme for

Mildred's transformation lasted, he dragged her with him wherever he went — dragged her spirit, for the body seemed to move readily. Thus, through the whole season, the ill-assorted pair were ever seen in company ; and Harry's assiduity of devotion became a nine days' wonder to all who beheld them — to those who only noted the contrast in the externals of person and behavior, as well as to the few who looked deeper, into the more numerous and important differences of mind and feeling.

But this outward union was too unreal to last long. It is probable that both were heartily tired of the attempt to walk in all things together, before they came to a virtual agreement to disagree in some.

Towards spring, Mildred took a cold, which rendered it prudent for her to avoid the night air, while it did not interfere with the routine of indoor life.

"Are you not going out this evening?" she asked Harry, one night, as he began to draw off his boots, and called for his slippers.

"And leave you here sick and alone?" said he, with a sort of complacent indignation.

It was the true Hazael spirit — "Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?"

"I am not sick," argued Mildred; "and you know I am never lonely when I am busy. Look here!" And she raised the lid of her work-stand.

"I meant to read to you," Harry remarked. "It has been an age since I have done so. At this rate, Macaulay will have finished the last volume of his history (which some say he never will do) before we get through the first."

"Oh, never mind him! The book will keep, and this is only one night, after all. You like sensible parties, such as Mrs. Courtenaye gives, I have heard you say. You had better go."

"There will be a pleasant gathering." Harry delayed removing the other boot. "Mrs. Courtenaye understands whom to invite together, and how to entertain her guests."

It was a symptom of surrender; and Mildred followed it up so successfully that, in half an hour more, he was arrayed in party costume, hat in hand, ready to go.

"Are you certain that you will not be lonely? that you are not afraid to remain here all by yourself?" he said, lingering, after he said "Good-by."

That solitary figure at the fireside contrasted painfully with his remembered pictures of domestic life.

"Afraid? of what? If you could only be convinced how much I prefer staying at home! This cold is a happy excuse. You cannot make a fine lady of me, Harry, do what you will. Homespun will be homespun to the end of the chapter."

Harry shut the door somewhat hastily behind him; he was not satisfied as to the propriety or kindness of his conduct in leaving his wife, and was willing to ascribe all his irritation to the uncomfortable impression produced by her last words.

"Why cannot she try to conform to my ideas—to take pleasure in such pursuits as I prefer?" he said, sharply, within himself. "If she loved me with all her heart, would she not sacrifice her inclinations sometimes to contribute to my happiness? She must see that the non-accordance of our sentiments, the total lack of harmony in everything, is an incessant trial to me, greater than open outbreaks of temper, or even of jealousy, would be."

There was an unusually large number of companionable people assembled that evening, thanks to the indefatigable efforts of Mrs. Courtenaye, who prided herself upon her "star parties," as they were called, and Harry entered into the spirit of the scene with a relish that surprised himself. He felt very much as if he had been suddenly relieved of a troublesome,

embarrassing clog, to which four months' wear had not accustomed him — so free was his speech, so buoyant his mood.

"I shall not be absent more than an hour — or two, at farthest," he had assured his wife. He did not recollect this promise until he caught sight of the lighted chamber-window, as he neared home at two o'clock in the morning.

"This is too bad!" he muttered, self-reproachfully. "The poor child must have had a wretchedly uneasy time. It was unpardonably careless, cruel in me! What must she think? how must she feel?"

Repeating "Poor girl!" in tones more like the tender accents of a lover than any she had heard since her marriage, he opened the door of her room. His confident expectation was to find her walking the floor in an agony of expectation, or, dissolved in tears and pallid with watching, seated by the fireless hearth. The fire had indeed gone out, and the dead coals were cold also; their glow had departed so long before. The room showed no marks of a restless vigil, of the distraction of grief; and his wife slumbered peacefully upon her pillow. One would naturally have expected some expression of satisfaction at the removal of his apprehensions — relief, which was perfected by a study of her quiet features, unstained by a tear, unwrinkled by a frown; but our unreasonable Benedict sighed, as he turned away.

"If she cared for me, she would have sat up until my return, or, at least, been troubled that I did not come in at the time I set. However" — his face clearing a little — "I need fear nothing in future from wounded feeling on her part."

This decision did Mildred injustice. She loved her husband with all the warmth of her nature, but she was neither sensitive nor imaginative. She would have been pleased to have him spend the evening with her, if Macaulay were not to be the consequence of this piece of conjugal civility. There was just

this grain of selfishness in her desire that he should seek entertainment abroad. The fire burned brightly ; the lamp shone clearly upon her sewing ; the room was warm ; her chair soft and luxurious, and her work interested her far more than the brilliant historian had ever done. If she missed Harry, she did not regret his absence, satisfied that he was enjoying himself elsewhere. When the hour he had named as the ultimatum of his stay had come and gone, she concluded, very sensibly, that he had met with entertainment sufficiently alluring to detain him later ; and, feeling sleepy, like a prudent woman, betook herself to her bed. She spoke honestly, the next morning, when she expressed her gratification that Harry had been tempted to prolong his merrymaking, and described, complacently, the "nice time" she had had at home.

Thenceforward, Harry felt no compunction in following the lead of his own fancy. His home was a convenience undoubtedly ; a suitable place in which to receive his friends ; rather a pleasant retirement when he was wearied by the toils of business life, or jaded after excitement. The mistress of the establishment was an excellent manager, a pattern housekeeper, who always met her husband's guests with a smile, never kept them waiting for dinner, and did not become so absorbed in the literary, philosophical, and legal questions discussed at her table, as to overlook the need of a single visitor in the matter of sauces, gravies, etc. She was happy as the day was long ; plump and rosy, by reason of her stirring habits ; and fully persuaded of what she had indeed never dreamed of doubting — that she had the best partner in the world, and that he had chosen and wedded her out of the plenitude of his loving admiration for those charms and qualities which made her, of all women, the one most thoroughly adapted to him. "Home-spun," as she styled herself, the incongruity of that material and the fine velvet she would have acknowledged him to be,

the odd effect produced by placing them side by side upon one shelf, did not present itself to her straightforward intellect.

The coming of a blue-eyed daughter, the mother in miniature, arrested, for a short season, Harry's growing callousness of heart. Ardently as he had hoped for a son instead, as he raised the tiny creature in his arms and pressed his lips to her soft cheek, he thrilled with new and delicious emotion. Towards her, whose was the partnership with him in the precious gift, he experienced a quickening of interest that lent an unwonted cadence to his speech, a fervency to the kiss of congratulation with which he replaced the babe by her side. This was Mildred's opportunity, if ever that oft-slighted angel offered to her the means of winning her husband's love, and she knew it not. Calm and undemonstrative herself, she was, probably, of all his friends, the least acquainted with his far different temperament. He was kind and indulgent to her, and she adhered, in theory as in practice, to the motto — "Deeds, not words." To her child, she was, in her quiet way, an example of maternal devotion. In the absorption of her every thought in care of and pride in it, she overlooked the important fact that the love of the father is never so self-forgetful as that of the mother. Harry's home began to lose what had heretofore been almost its only attraction — its air of neat comfort. Mildred's supervision of every department of housekeeping relaxed in vigilance. He was often mortified by ill-served meals and untidy rooms when he had company; and his temper was tried by irregularity and neglect where he had always enjoined, and until now found, punctual regard to his wishes.

Mrs. Eldredge fell into the country habit of seeing visitors in her chamber-nursery, and there was seldom fire in the parlor when the master of the house came home. If he played the dutiful and domestic by passing the evening with his "family" — a name that had sounded most pleasant at first — his choice

of recreation, after his day's labors, was very limited. Mildred no longer sewed at night, knitting requiring less light, and consideration for "baby's" eyes rendering a dim room necessary. Harry could not read by the faint radiance to which she tempered the lamp, and chess, a favorite game with him, was a perplexing mystery to his wife. He might talk if "baby" slept very soundly and he did not speak too loudly, but his beloved cigar was absolutely tabooed. Mildred was not a shrew or tyrant, only the instinct of maternity was more powerful than the graft of wifely regard. Unselfishly as ever, she excused her husband's absences from home, the more cheerfully now that "baby was so much company." Harry's social nature pleaded persuasively for indulgence, and his sense of duty had been so frequently overcome that its voice was weakened.

CHAPTER III.

WITHOUT further detail of the process which led to such a result, pass we to the period when Harry Eldredge was known in society as a "gay married man," a reputation than which every loving wife who knows the world would rather have her husband bear the title of a Diogenes. Still, he maintained his place in public favor. The many who flattered and caressed him, if they ever gave a thought to her whom the law called his companion, were but the more profuse in their attentions, as a compensation for what he must undergo in an alliance so unfortunate. The minority who really knew and loved him, while they could not conceal from themselves that his course was reprehensible, yet felt little sympathy for the wife who was unconscious that she stood in need of their commiseration.

One friend had marked the career of the mismated man, from the first step to the present time.

"This will never do, Kate! it has gone far enough — I am afraid too far!" ejaculated Mr. Coleman, one night, as, seated beside his niece, in a crowded concert-room, he beheld Harry make his way through the throng, with a young and beautiful girl on his arm.

Kate, now Mrs. Strother, the wife of a man who deserved and valued the prize he had won, was chatting gayly with her husband, and had not remarked the entrance of the pair who had called forth her uncle's expression of disapproval. "What has gone too far?" she inquired, startled.

"I'll wager my head," continued the old gentleman, striking his cane upon the floor, "that the poor, unsophisticated child Harry Eldredge has been dancing attendance upon, this month past, has not a suspicion that he is a married man."

"Uncle !"

Her shocked face was more eloquent than her accent of horrified surprise.

"I believe what I have said, Kate ; this is not the first time I have watched them. She is an innocent, simple little thing, susceptible as pretty, and a visitor to that giddy Mrs. Morland."

"Hush ! hush !" whispered Kate, glancing around apprehensively. "Do not call names here !"

"As you please," assented her uncle, lowering his voice. "All I have to say is that it is a shame. I thought the boy had more principle. It is bad enough to slight his wife, without playing the flirt with such a novice as this young girl. She is too sweet a creature to risk the wreck of affections in this style. I wish she were back among her friends. I suppose she has some protector somewhere."

"Change the subject," said Mr. Strother, aside to Kate.

By the exercise of much tact, she effected this object. The old man was growing garrulous, and was more excitable than of yore. Mr. Strother did not communicate that night, even to his wife, a circumstance that had aroused his uneasiness, yet had escaped the eyes of his companions.

Directly in front of Mr. Coleman sat a young man who seemed to be connected with no party or person in his vicinity. From the instant Harry Eldredge's name was mentioned, he had listened keenly to every word uttered by the censor, listened with stilled breath and a changing cheek. He offered to rise, as if to confront Mr. Coleman when the subject was dropped ; but some reverse of intention, or the recollection of the publicity of the place, caused him to retain his seat.

Harry enjoyed the concert exceedingly. In addition to the gratification of his musical taste, he had the pleasant consciousness of having conferred delight upon another. Esther Morrison was the relative and guest of Mrs. Morland, a lively, fashionable widow, good-natured, and thoughtless to a fault. She gave brilliant parties, and was the leader in every attractive scheme of amusement. Her house was the favorite resort of the gay youth of her acquaintance, and was frequented by many whose intellectual stamp was of a higher order than that of the fluttering moths that constantly followed her. Esther's simplicity of manner, and the pure, fresh style of her beauty, had captivated Harry's eye. His admiration, he knew, would insure the homage of others who might otherwise overlook the modest stranger. Mrs. Morland had confided to him her resolution that her "sweet snowdrop of a cousin" should be the fashion in her set that season, and invoked his assistance in the accomplishment of this plan. Misled by the prevalent idea that, because the attentions of a married man can excite no "expectations" he can offer them with impunity, he had constituted himself her especial escort, and commenced, as zealously as the dashing widow could have wished, the task of "bringing out" and crowning her with belleship.

On their return from the concert in question, while Mrs. Morland's cavalier took leave at the door of her mansion, Harry followed the ladies into the parlor with the easy confidence of a privileged friend. Refreshments were brought in, and, sitting side by side with Esther upon the sofa, he was discussing an ice and the prima donna of the evening, when a ring at the front door, sharply repeated, drew from Mrs. Morland an impatient exclamation at the footman's tardiness.

"And the bell-wire in this room is out of order," she said, rising and walking into the back parlor from whence she could summon the delinquent. He had answered the door by the

time she rang; and, hearing him pass through the hall on his way back to the kitchen, she stepped out to admonish him against a repetition of the negligence. By such slight straws of circumstance is the whole tenor of life and feeling often changed. She was petrified with amazement at the scene which was presented to her view upon her return to the drawing-room. Esther, pale and alarmed, clung beseechingly to the arm of the new-comer, a young man of two or three-and-twenty, whose voice was thick with fury as he addressed Eldredge.

"You pretend ignorance, sir; are 'unconscious of any injury intended or offered to me or mine.' I will enlighten you, and that speedily, but not here. This is no place for such conversation."

He tried, but vainly, to disengage himself from the frightened girl.

Mrs. Morland, astonished though she was, retained more self-possession than her timid cousin. "Ronald," she said, laying her hand upon his other arm, "what does all this mean? This gentleman is my friend, and an acquaintance of your sister's. You told her this morning that you had never seen him. What is the cause of this unbecoming behavior and language to him, and in our presence?"

She spoke firmly, with more dignity than she was wont to assume. The fiery boy lowered his tone, although in no wise appeased by her interference.

"I am aware, Mrs. Morland, that my manners do not become your presence or house — that, in your refined clique, it will be considered a capital joke that the unsophisticated countryman should have endeavored to save his sister from a lifetime of misery."

"You are surely mad! Who talks of misery? Nobody ever thought of such a thing except yourself," returned the really bewildered lady.

"Probably. The word has been excluded from your vocabulary, is never spoken in ears polite." And, with the same fierce sarcasm, he proceeded: "I came here to-night intending to seek information, to confer privately with you with regard to certain matters I heard discussed not two hours since in a public assembly. I was told that I should find you here; but, instead, I interrupted an interview, a confidential *tête-à-tête* — mark you, madam! sanctioned by your ladyship! — between my sister and a notorious *married flirt*!"

Esther fell away from his arm, and, staggering several paces to a seat, gazed, white and speechless, at Harry. The look almost unmanned him. He was as pale as herself, as he replied to the unexpected attack.

"I repel your charge, sir. My position and character are well known in this community. You have been grossly misinformed if you have been led to believe that my attentions to your sister have been other than might have been offered by an elder brother or uncle. A flirt I am not, nor ever shall be. That I am married is a 'notorious' fact, if you like the word. It is no news to any one here besides yourself. Mrs. Morland knew it. Miss Morrison could not — if I had desired to trifle with her — have been kept in ignorance of it" — turning towards her.

Her head drooped upon her hands. She seemed not to have heard the appeal.

"Of course, she could not!" Mrs. Morland said, quickly. "The very idea is absurd. It is all a mistake, you see, Ronald. Unless I am greatly in error, Esther has met with Mrs. Eldredge since she has been with me. At any rate, she has heard a hundred times that Mr. Eldredge had a wife."

"Never once! as Heaven is my witness, not once!" uttered Esther, in a tone so hollow and broken that all started. Without another word, she arose, her face of unspeakable misery,

ghastly by contrast with her gay attire, and passed from the apartment.

Mrs. Morland accompanied her to the door, but paused there, and returned to the two who stood glaring upon each other.

"I am shocked ! distressed beyond expression !" she said ; and there were tears in her eyes. "I cannot believe — it is incredible that I could have been so careless, or that Esther should not have heard abroad what were Mr. Eldredge's relations ; but indeed, Ronald, it was all my fault, my inexcusable thoughtlessness. Mr. Eldredge is perfectly innocent. His wife is very domestic in her tastes, and — and — never goes out. He is fond of company, and is an intimate acquaintance of mine. As such, he has waited upon Esther as her own father might have done. I solemnly declare this to be the truth."

Stern and gloomy, Ronald stalked up and down the room, so far from being pacified that the kind-hearted hostess essayed a second emollient : "I do not know who has so vilely misrepresented their intercourse to you. I could not have credited the existence of such base spite in the world. Not a whisper of scandal has ever been breathed about them before, for in society these things are so well understood."

"Enough !" broke forth Ronald, abruptly. "Between you two, you have destroyed the happiness of a foolish, trusting child. It matters little where the blame lies ; you may divide it, and each of you have more upon your conscience than I should like to bear upon mine. My visit to the city ends to-morrow, madam. Will you notify my sister that she is to accompany me ? The sooner she quits 'society' forever, the better. I have no inclination to hazard a second peep at its iniquitous mysteries myself. As to you, sir," to Harry, "without pretending to decide the difficult question whether you are or are not a cold-blooded villain, as well as a faithless husband, allow

me to inform you that, if you ever attempt to speak to my sister again, I will blow your brains out. Nothing but the reflection that she would be compromised in the eyes of the public by such an act prevents me from doing it now."

"I am ready for you, sir, at any moment," began Harry, haughtily; but Mrs. Morland, with a scream, threw herself against him, and fairly pushed and pulled him into the hall; then, by mingling persuasions with tears, prevailed upon him to leave the house without further hostile demonstrations. As she had anticipated, he waited some time outside the door, watching for the egress of his antagonist, and she took care to defeat his design. Ronald, in spite of his wrath, was detained by divers manœuvres, until Harry's patience and heat both declined.

Full of bitter thoughts, he mounted the stairs to his wife's chamber. She was usually asleep at this hour, but to-night the little Milly was not well, and the mother sat by the fire with her in her arms, singing, in soothing tones, an old lullaby. She turned her round, good-humored face towards the entrance.

"Ah, Harry, you are early! Was not the concert a good one, or was your pretty new belle less interesting than she generally is? By the way, I saw her in a store to-day, and had a fair look at her. I don't wonder at your taste. Mr. Marvin says you have the reputation of bringing out the prettiest girls of every season. He asked me if I wasn't jealous, as if I had not perfect confidence in you! I laughed in his face, as I did in that tattling old Miss Vaughan's, when she told me that you went, everywhere, by the name of the married flirt."

She laughed now, as she repeated the absurdity she imagined would awaken his merriment also, and, meeting no response from him, settled it in her own mind that he was "tired and a little bit cross," and recommenced her song to the child.

A single glance of grieved tenderness—the moistening of

an eye — the trembling of a note in her careless speech would have drawn the miserable man to her feet, for his heart was breaking to pour itself out into a sympathizing ear. He would thankfully have laid his head upon her breast — unloved wife as she was — and sobbed, in childlike abandonment, a confession of his yearning affections, his incomplete existence.

And, in unintentional mockery, rang out Mildred's voice : —

“And this the burden of his song,
Which evermore would be,
I care for nobody — no ! not I !
Since nobody cares for me.”

Harry Eldredge has greatly depreciated in the estimation of his merry comrades of former days ; has hardened and settled into the merest business machine. He is making his way rapidly to the top of the political ladder, for, say his opponents, feeling never stands in his way ; heart and nerve are alike iron. Home he has none ; for, except after dark and on Sundays, he is rarely seen in the house where his wife and children live. She, insensitive, and, consequently, contented as ever, Dutch in figure, and ruddy in countenance, fondles and corrects, as occasion demands, the thrifty olive-branches that are shooting up about her, and inculcates, as cardinal duties, the propriety of clean faces and whole aprons when papa comes home, together with a scrupulous avoidance of the neighborhood of the library, where he writes and studies far into every night. She is still, to herself, the model wife and mother ; for, does she not live with, labor for, and trust in him with fidelity, diligence, and implicitness ? He is morose — “it is because business troubles him,” she says — sad, and “he has a fit of the blues, which will go off of itself, if he is not noticed.”

What knows she of the pale spectre that, at these hours — ay, and often at other times — in the whirl of business, the

clamor of political strife, the still darkness of wakeful mid-nights, glides before him, with eyes full of sorrowful reproach? of hollow accents, that repeat, like the knell of happy dreams and love's hopes, "Never once! as Heaven is my witness, not once!"

By what faculty of her nature, what instinct, is she to learn the secret of the depths, dusty, and dark, and drear, of his empty heart?

TWO WAYS OF KEEPING A WIFE.

CHAPTER I.

It was an event of no ordinary importance which drew together so large and gay an assemblage at the hospitable mansion of Mr. Pierson, on a moonlight evening of early May. Two sisters, who had hardly been separated for a day from the birth of the younger until now, were united in wedlock to young men, intimate friends and partners in business. It is seldom that unions so agreeable to the parties most nearly concerned meet with such unequivocal approbation from relatives and the public at large, as did this double marriage. Both brides were pretty, one beautiful; both sensible, amiable, and refined. The grooms formed an undeniably eligible firm in appearance, intelligence, moral worth and enterprise.

"And they have paired with singular judgment," commented a beau to a lady acquaintance. "Wonder if it was by mutual and unselfish agreement that the better looking man took the plainer girl? A novel method of striking a balance, was it not?"

"I am rather disposed to consider it as another illustration of the all-prevailing law of compensations," rejoined his fair companion. "In point of loveliness, or lovableness, if you will allow the polysyllable, however, the sisters are more alike. If either is my favorite, I must concede the palm to Fanny, whom you call 'plain.' She has more character than Rose,

who unconsciously relies somewhat upon her face to win love, and open her a path through the world."

"She may well trust to it," would have been the comment of the happy and fortunate husband, if he had overheard the criticism. Yet John Gray was not liable to be governed by the desire of the eye. In his selection of Rose Pierson as a helpmate in the life which was so practical and earnest a matter with him, her beauty was the least weighty of the considerations that swayed him. To-night, in the fulness of his wedded bliss, while he recognized, with the rest of her spectators, the enhancement of every charm by excitement and happiness, he exulted less in the possession of the greatest of these, than did Raymond Parkhurst in the contemplation of the — to others — less attractive sister. But, to the lookers-on, if the handsome features expressed more pleasure than did the naturally graver countenance of his partner, it was because they *were* handsome and eloquent in their obedience to the mandate of feeling.

"John Gray was a steady, safe, good fellow," said men of the world. "The concern was a flourishing one, and without pretending to a knowledge of what went on behind the scenes," they surmised shrewdly, that "he was the balance-wheel, the hold-back horse to Parkhurst's enthusiasm, which some" — not themselves, of course, but the ubiquitous, infallibly-judging "Some" — "might term 'flightiness.'"

With the other sex, Parkhurst was decidedly popular. More than one rosy cheek paled for an instant as his fervent response to the nuptial vow broke the stillness of the crowded room; many a soft heart heaved with an involuntary sigh at the sight of his devotion to his bride, and her modest, yet palpable appreciation of the prize she had drawn in the greatest and most uncertain of lotteries. Not that Raymond had ever indulged in the very fashionable and very masculine recrea-

tion — with too many, a studied profession — of flirting. His attentions had been as open as they were general and sincere, until he fell in love with Fanny Pierson's frank, smiling face and fascinating manners. If any maiden chose to wear the willow for him, her assumption of the woful wreath was gratuitous, and by him unsuspected. He "liked the ladies," he would have affirmed, with a hearty "Heaven bless them!" He felt a spontaneous affection and reverence for everything in the shape of womanhood, for had not he "a darling mother, the jewel of all women, and four of the best sisters in the universe," still living in and about the old homestead, a hundred miles or so back in the country? And, as his eyes dwell lovingly upon the bright young creature at his side, pass from her face to the simple, broad band of gold upon her finger, with a smile of triumphant security, experienced, for the first time in all its rapturous sweetness, by the newly-made husband, when God and man have set a public seal upon the heart-contract — one sees clearly what is his mental supplement to the eulogium upon the sex at large, and the feminine portion of his family in particular.

John Gray had been reared very differently. He, too, had a mother, a strong-minded, strong-doing woman, who had thrust out, in succession, five sons from the parent-nest so soon as their callow bodies were, figuratively, covered with feathers enough to keep them from freezing outright. Once beyond the shelter of their birthplace, the principle of action, if not of speech, was, "Fly or break your neck!" Four did fly — after a while — vigorously and successfully; a fifth, the youngest, who most narrowly missed being the home-pet, if one could imagine such an anomaly in the mother's stern, hard existence, kept back from the venture though he was, longer than any of his predecessors, fluttered aimlessly from bough to bough, heedless of maternal admonition and paternal remonstrance,

and then fell, few knew or cared into what jaws of temptation or pit of crime. John was the third son, and none other had thriven better since his compulsory achievement of an independent career. His early lot had not soured him. His temper, if firm, was even and pleasant; his principles, if rigid, strictly honorable, or, to use a word we value more highly in these so-called "honorable" times — honest. If less admired than his associate in business, he was universally respected, and beloved by one, at least, with a depth and strength that would have compensated to a more craving heart, for the dearth of motherly and sisterly tenderness.

The bridal tours of the two couples were to the respective homes of the bridegrooms. Rose was welcomed with solid satisfaction, and made much of, after the fashion of her ambitious mother-in-law, as the daughter of a wealthy and prominent citizen of a growing city, and the probable stepping-stone to "my son's" increased honor and affluence; while Fanny was "Ray's wife" to the five doating, "dearest women in the universe;" petted, caressed, almost worshipped, at first, in virtue of this relationship; subsequently, for her own sake. Mr. Pierson's primary action with regard to his sons-in-law would not have disappointed Mrs. Gray, Senior, had he not contented himself, for the present, with bestowing upon the sisters neatly-furnished houses, built and finished in modern style, situated in a block of buildings owned by himself.

"The house is all very well," pronounced the sagacious dame, when she spent a day in the city, to see for herself how her son was likely to fare after his recent "investment." "Indeed, it is too handsome for a man of your means, John. Young people should not strive to begin where their parents left off. In making you this gift, Mr. Pierson binds upon you the obligation to live in a certain style, which does not seem to me to befit a man who has his fortune to make. It would

have been more wise and kind in him to give you the worth of the property in money. You could have invested it in your business, or in some other way. Money grows by handling. It is like a snowball, swells by being often turned over. Real estate is an incumbrance, unless one rents it out, or can afford to have his funds bound up in it until the property greatly increases in value. You cannot sell this at any rate, during Mr. Pierson's lifetime. It is a pity that you must be hampered by family feeling and policy."

"But, mother," said John, respectfully, "we must live somewhere, and where so comfortably and cheaply as in our own house? The saving of a year's rent will almost cover our other expenses."

"Where! why, in a boarding-house, in a decent, not over-stylish establishment, such as millionaires have not disdained to occupy after their incomes doubled, trebled, yes, quadrupled the amount of their original capital."

John was silent. Ashamed as he was of the ungrateful slurs cast upon the generosity of his wife's father, he could not but acknowledge to himself that there was a deal of practical wisdom in his mother's comments.

"What is done cannot be helped, I suppose," resumed Mrs. Gray, lowering her voice as Rose was heard approaching. "All that you can do towards retrieving this injudicious step is to study good management and practise economy."

At Fanny's urgent solicitation, Mabel, Raymond's only unmarried sister passed ten days with them immediately after their induction into their new abode. She carried back such a description of this sojourn in that terrestrial paradise, "Ray's and Fanny's house," that the mother, who, in country parlance, "had not been out of the smoke of her chimneys" for thirty years, was beguiled, in a moment of excitement, with a half-promise "to look in upon the boy some time next winter, if Providence spared her life and health so long."

Mr. Pierson, with the counsel and assistance of his wife, had succeeded in rendering the sisters' dwellings almost exact counterparts each of the other. If there was any difference, it consisted in sundry luxurious devices, planned and executed by Mrs. Pierson for promoting the comfort of her elder, and it was sometimes whispered, her best-loved child. Fanny was too noble of spirit, and herself loved her beautiful sister too well to be jealous, had such favoritism existed, and she knew that there was no ground for imputation save in the imaginations of those who promulgated the story. Rose was, in disposition, dependent, and as a child, had been delicate in health. It became the habit of the household to indulge her, and her second nature to expect and need indulgence.

"She is a sensitive plant, John. Deal very gently with her," was the mother's charge in relinquishing her into her husband's keeping, and his response was sincere in its emphasis: "My own life shall not be guarded so carefully as her ease and happiness."

"I am behaving very generously towards you," Mr. Pierson said to Raymond, as they grasped hands at parting, the morning after the marriage. "I am robbing my home of its brightest sunshine in resigning my Fanny to you."

Time sped on with its burden of changes, responsibilities, and joys, and brought the second anniversary of the double wedding — a fortnight later, the birthday of the sisters, which, by a rather singular coincidence, occurred upon the same day of the month, Rose being exactly two years Fanny's senior. This year it chanced to fall upon Monday, at once the dread and comfort of notable housewives, the universal washing-time, which a wicked wit asserts to have been instituted in commemoration of Job's natal-day — the one he cursed.

The afternoon was warm; within doors, oppressive. Rose Gray sat in her nursery. Her sewing lay in the basket by

her side, thimble and scissors thrown upon it, dropped hastily, to be resumed at the earliest possible moment. Her present occupation was the attempt to soothe and amuse a fretful, puny girl upon her lap. Maternal duties and anxieties had stolen elasticity from the frame, and color from the cheek of the young wife. It was easy to perceive that she had grown comparatively indifferent to her dress and appearance. Although several hours had elapsed since dinner, she still wore a morning-wrapper, clean and whole indeed, but old-fashioned in pattern and faded by use. It had formed a part of her *trousseau*, and her wardrobe contained few garments of a later date.

"I should not know what to do with it," she would reply to her sister's recommendations to purchase this or that article of apparel. "I had such a number of dresses when I was married, that I have not begun to wear them out. Then, too, I stay at home so closely, that it would be sheer extravagance to add to my stock of clothing."

The room was in perfect order. The furniture, Mr. Pierson's gift, was, with the exception of the cradle, in every respect the same as upon the day the owners had taken possession, and its good preservation argued housewifery the most careful and painstaking, the thought of which would have caused any reflecting mother a throb of pity, as she looked at the babe, just arrived at the most troublesome and mischievous age. But the little creature seemed to have no heart for play, no propensity to litter the carpet, or toss around all the movables it could lay its restless hands upon. The heat from its swollen gums had diffused itself throughout the body, and was aggravated by the sultry day.

"There, there, my darling!" murmured Rose, as the peevish wail recommenced, and the child's limbs writhed in passion or suffering. "Is mamma's Hetty thirsty? does she want some bread? Oh, see the beautiful dolly grandpa gave her!"

Hetty rejected drink, food, and toy, and the plaintive, yet annoying cry continued to torment the parent's nerves.

"O me!" sighed she, rising with the infant in her arms, and pacing the floor. It was not the novelty of the ordeal, but its repetition, that forced the tears now coursing down her face. She did not know that they were there, only that there was some relief of the suffocation in her throat, the dull aching in her back. They were such unreasonable drops as arouse quick-tempered men to anger, and good-natured ones to contempt, which all concur in pronouncing "womanish" and "babyish" — descriptive epithets, that none of the initiated of our sisterhood should care to dispute. Let us rather be thankful for their flow, when sleepless nights, and days of fatigue, and solitude, not the less wearing because it is voted "unnecessary," "altogether uncalled-for," "what all mothers have to undergo and should therefore expect," have racked and strained muscle and nerve; turned our daily bread into ashes, blunted our perceptions to all that was once beautiful to the sight, pleasant to the ear, stimulative to the intellect.

One single complaint had Rose once uttered in the hearing of her healthy, hearty-eating, soundly-sleeping lord:

"I had no idea that babies were such a trouble!" she was unnatural enough to say, at the close of a toilsome day, following upon a vigil as trying.

John let his paper fall in an excess of surprise and indignation. "Rose! I never expected to hear such language from you! Would you be happier if your child were taken from you? One might suppose, from your manner and words, that you wished her dead!"

"Dead!" Oh, he little guessed what a leaden weight crashed through the mother's brain, and tore its way to the bottom of her heart, when the full meaning, the direful import of *that* word rested there. How could he suspect, when he chided

her, in the morning, for having taken the babe to her couch, there to sap the foundations of strength and vitality, by its remorseless demands, that she had sprung, at midnight, from the pillow, wet with the hot tears of self-reproach, and wild, terrible forebodings of the awful thing he had named, and crept to the side of the crib where reposed her darling in the dreamless, unstirring sleep of infancy, so like its twin brother, Death! how eagerly she had snatched her idol to her bosom at the thought. Yes, hailed its awakening scream with an inarticulate, but how devout a thanksgiving that it was still alive and hers!

A lumpish Irish girl, red-armed, and slatternly from the washtub, checked the doleful promenade through the apartment. Between a moist finger and thumb she held a card.

"Lady and gentleman in the parlor for ye, Mrs. Gray!"

"Mr. and Mrs. Wyndham!" read Rose, in dismay. "What shall I do?"

They were influential friends of Mr. Gray's, fashionable, punctilious people, whose acquaintance he particularly wished her to cultivate.

"Catherine! don't you think Hetty will stay with you a little while? Will not you try to keep her quiet while I am in the parlor? just a few minutes, Catherine?"

The girl, thus implored, extended her arms, but Hetty rebelled at the sulky invitation, and clung screamingly to her mother's neck.

"What shall I do?" reiterated the nearly distracted Rose. "Hetty! be still! you must go! Take her, Catherine!"

Literally torn from her hold, the child was borne off, filling the house with her shrieks. To this music, which no walls or doors could deaden, Mrs. Gray was obliged to listen while, panting from recent exertion and her hasty toilet, she tried to entertain her visitors. Relieved at length by their politely

considerate departure, she flew to the kitchen to quell the tumult. Catherine was deep in her tub, and Hetty, sitting upon the floor, in alarming and most uncomfortable proximity to the red-hot stove, inhaling, at each vociferous inspiration, the vapor, redolent of turpentine soap, and the more nauseous effluvia of suds, in which the soiled clothes had undergone a nominal purification — the not-analyzable, but unmistakable incense that ascends weekly from thousands of kitchens in our land, to the patron saint — if there be a saint with such villainous taste in perfumes — of washing-day.

“When will I be setting the tay-table?” queried Catherine, as her mistress reshouldered her heavy load.

“It is almost time!” answered Rose, with a despairing look at the clock. “Don’t leave your work, Catherine. I will do it for you.”

The nymph of the suds evinced neither surprise nor gratitude at this reply. Why should she, when her question had been designed as a hint to her fellow-laborer that this portion of her regular Monday’s duties was not to be evaded for such slight reasons as a crying baby, headache, lassitude, and painful bones? A woman can accomplish wonders, in an emergency, with one hand; and Rose, tolerably well-trained, of late, to these feats, put on the kettle, and proceeded to spread the cloth in the dining-room; to set cups, saucers, plates, and glasses; to arrange spoons, knives and forks, with Hetty, diverted by the clattering china and bright silver, therefore quiet for the nonce, upon her arm. But bread, butter, cake, and John’s indispensable chipped beef were still to be prepared, and Miss Hetty’s lively sense of her grievous personal wrongs was rekindled in all its bitterness when she found herself tied in a high chair, and left to seek amusement by inspecting her own image in the bowl of a spoon. The bread was cut unevenly and too thick — a point concerning which, John, although not

a confessed epicure, was very particular; and the cake was forgotten, along with the glass dish of preserves or stewed fruit that usually mounted guard before his plate.

Unconscious of her shortcomings, Rose ascended the stairs to the nursery; cast, for the hundredth time that day, a wistful, hopeless glance at the work-basket and its pile of collars, a new set, for which John was "actually suffering," and addressed herself anew to the refreshing, delightful recreation of tending the baby.

"Mere sport — entrancing occupation — a never-ending, ever-new joy," say out-of-the-house-all-day husbands, sentimental misses, and poetic amateur nursery-loungers, and the public is bound to take their descriptions for unembellished truth, for has it not been with them "a favorite study?" Rose Gray was neither sentimental nor poetic. She loved her baby better than she did the right hand that held her up to her sore and bowed shoulder; better than the head bent, in very exhaustion, upon the flaxen poll of the little one; better than the blood that filled her veins; yet if the hand had felt less like parting company with its faithful wrist, the shoulders been erect and free, instead of cramping lungs and heart; had the head throbbed less violently, and the blood streamed in a cooler, slower tide, she would have been in a fitter condition to appreciate the gushing melody of the "well-spring of pleasure," which the above-quoted Tupperian philosophers are fond of describing.

Fanny Parkhurst's spacious dressing-room had been converted into a nursery at nearly the same date with the advent of Hetty Gray. Master Charles Pierson Parkhurst was the occasion of this innovation in household arrangements — an important personage in his small sphere, a distinction he recognized by the daily, hourly development of some eminently boyish trait. His lungs were powerful; his limbs active and lusty; his temper quick, yet in the main sunny, and, under the

tutelage of his proud father, he was fast becoming the noisiest, most reckless romp that ever smashed crockery, or tumbled fifty times per diem from every imaginable and unimaginable climbing-place.

On the spring afternoon that so tried the patience of his cousin and his aunt, the chubby rogue was extended on the carpet of his state drawing-room, changed from its original use, as before related, to accommodate his highness, kicking his fat heels into the air with a sort of lordly independence that accorded well with his pouting mouth and laughing eyes. Near by was his mother — her book closed upon her finger, her lips parted in a smile at the antics of her first-born. Her face was slightly flushed with the warmth of the day. A glass of iced water, and a palm-leaf fan on the stand at her elbow, showed that she was not insensible to the effects of the change of season, but the glow made her complexion seem fresher and clearer than was its wont, and her animated expression, even girlish in its glee, combined with this to give her a more youthful appearance than had been Fanny Pierson's on her bridal eve. Her robe was a thin *barège*, its colors well-contrasted and delicate, its flounces falling in silky folds from the slender, rotund waist to the floor. For a headdress, she wore a spray of myrtle intertwined with pink and white verbenas. The breath of other and sweeter flowers — mignonette, roses, and lilacs — stole balmily upon the senses from a bouquet that graced the mantel. Their vernal beauties would not have been safe at a shorter distance from the grasping fingers of the embryo Alexander, rolling about on the rug like a seal in the sunshine. They were not hot-house exotics, but blossoms of domestic growth, common home-plants. Raymond had bought them at market that morning; cheated the dullard of a saleswoman by paying a "levy" for a room-full of perfume, such as Nour-mahal might have coveted in the midst of her orange-blooms

and tuberoses. The honest fellow felt a twinge of conscience at the recollection of the swindle, unthinkingly perpetrated, as Fanny caught the bouquet from his hand on his return home to breakfast, and buried her nose so deeply in its recesses, that only her delighted eyebrows were visible above it; then thanked the "darlingest, most thoughtful of husbands," with a kiss, in which was blent all the fragrance of the flowers.

The tableau of mother and boy was thrown into disorder by the sound of a bounding step and cheery whistle upon the staircase. Instantly, Master Charley whirled over to his hands and feet, and crept rapidly towards the door. He did not reach it until his mother had received the salutatory kiss, and his father was quite ready for him.

"Hallo, my man!" exclaimed Raymond, catching up the sturdy urchin, and tossing him up and down, as far as his stalwart arms could carry him. "Want to fly, hey? So he shall, as long as papa can furnish him with wings. Hear him chuckle, Fan. What a boy it is!"

"I wish he would walk, instead of creeping," said Fanny. "He soils and wears out so many frocks. Who would think that he was dressed clean directly after dinner?"

"Papa and Charley don't care!" retorted Raymond, tickling the plump neck with kisses, until the babe fairly shouted in his merriment. "We admire dirty frocks and torn aprons; don't we, my boy? 'Tisn't everybody's child that can creep, but we are a locomotive, with full steam on. See!" — taking a ball from his pocket, and trundling it along the floor — "Charley, catch! Now go it! How the fellow travels!"

"I play brakeman to this train!" laughed Fanny, capturing boy and ball together. "Really, Ray, dear, I had as lief not have the trouble of washing and dressing him again this afternoon. This sultry weather makes me lazy."

"Are you not well?" inquired the husband anxiously.

"Perfectly ; only a little languid in consequence of the unusual heat, and the sudden change in the atmosphere. I am always more tired on Monday afternoon than on any other day —"

"Because you will undertake the sole care of the child!" returned Raymond. "I wish you would listen to my persuasions and hire an extra washerwoman, if your cook cannot get up the clothes in proper season. It worries me to see you do a servant's work!"

"Tell papa he knows nothing about the fine times we have here — all by ourselves!" said Fanny, presenting the baby's mouth for a kiss. "Bessie only helps Bridget in the kitchen until the clothes are washed and hung out. If papa and Charley like to make frocks and aprons dirty, they must not blame mamma and Bessie for liking to see them clean again."

She lifted Charley to one of her father's knees, and established herself upon the other. Raymond trotted them alternately.

"It is hard to tell which is the heavier," he said jocosely ; then, gravely : "You are not looking very robust now-a-days, pet."

"Ah! It is only a fancy of yours, I think. I suffer no pain. I eat and sleep well, and am conscious of no indisposition."

Raymond did not reply. He appeared to be listening to the passing of vehicles in the street. Gently setting aside his double burden, he walked to the window.

"Come here, Fanny!"

A light buggy, drawn by a glossy horse, was at the door. The whole equipage was so neat and stylish that Fanny exclaimed with admiration —

"A pretty turnout! What a beauty that horse is! To whom does it belong?"

“To you!”

“You are going to treat me to a ride, then? You are too good! and I have been wishing all day for a breath of fresh air! But where did you hire such an elegant establishment? It has not the livery-stable look.”

“I bought the horse several weeks since, that I might assure myself that he was a safe animal before I put my treasures at his mercy; the buggy I had built, stipulating that it should be completed by to-day. Will my wife accept it as a token that her husband loves her better, is more desirous to minister to her comfort and happiness, than he was two years ago? It is but a poor proof, after all, of how much dearer the wife is than was the bride.”

Forgetful of passers-by and opposite neighbors, Fanny threw her arms about his neck, and fairly sobbed upon his bosom, “It is too much, too much!” she cried. “You make a spoiled baby of me, Raymond!” laughing hysterically, and wiping away the tears that others fell fast to replace.

“Fie! my darling,” said Raymond, pretending to scold, while his eyes were full also. “You are ruining your eyes and making your nose red, when you ought to be looking your prettiest, for you are to ride in your own carriage now, directly. Hear Charley blubber ‘mamma!’ Do quiet his distressed heart! He thinks I have been maltreating you.”

“May I take him with us?” asked Fanny.

“Certainly; he can sit between us. You shall not hold him on your knee again, as you did the other day; he is growing too heavy. I am convinced that a ride in that position does you more harm than good.”

“You rate my powers of endurance at a very low figure,” said Fanny, busying herself with getting out the hats and wrappings necessary for their jaunt.

“Not at all; I wish to preserve them unimpaired. Give

me Charley's cap and cloak ; I will play dressing-maid to him."

The new buggy swung easily upon its springs ; the cushions of the seat and back were "just right," Fanny declared ; Charley was miraculously quiet in the mighty interest awakened by the various objects they passed ; the sleek bay was gentle as fleet, and his owners compared notes, with the gratifying conclusion that no excursion of their courtship was ever more pleasant than this ride into the green and fragrant country.

"Do all women think their husbands the best of mankind?" wondered Fanny, thoughtfully ; "or am I really more highly favored than a majority of wives?"

"Not a bit of it!" returned Raymond, bluntly ; "every seine that splashes into the sea matrimonial brings up better fish than you have caught. Good-afternoon, Mr. Brent."

They had turned the horse's head towards the city, and the individual addressed — a fat farmer, driving a pony as corpulent — took the right side of the road to give them the main track. As he did so, he raised his hand as a signal that he had something to say. With apparent reluctance, Raymond halted.

"I left the strawberries and the *genuwine* cream — no chalk and water — 'cording to our arrangement," he drawled. "I hope you'll enjoy them." And pursy man and pony jogged on.

"Strawberries!" repeated Fanny, "and cream! What does it all mean, dear?"

"It means that a little surprise which I meditated as a sauce to your supper is spoiled by an officious tongue," said Raymond, provoked.

"What a man you are!" was the brief rejoinder ; but the affectionate glance accompanying the ambiguous sentence spoke volumes. "I have but one suggestion to offer with regard to your programme of 'the day we celebrate,'" remarked Fanny,

as they neared home; "have you any objection to Rose's and John's company to tea? You know this is her birthday, too."

"I remember; and shall be more than glad to have them with us. Here we are close by their house. I will wait for you, while you run in and invite them."

Fanny was absent longer than Charley thought convenient, and the endeavor to appease his resentment at the injury he had sustained occupied his mother until they were set down at their own door. Bessie, a smiling lass, whose rosy face and white apron were alike discreet concerning the mysteries of the kitchen rites which had occupied her since early morning, ran down the steps to receive the "babby." The man from the livery-stable was in attendance by appointment, and, transferring the reins to his keeping, Raymond followed his wife up to her chamber. Her sparkling countenance was subdued into pensiveness; but, without speaking, she folded her shawl and laid it away with her bonnet, brushed her hair, and replaced her headdress. Then she sought her favorite perch — her husband's knee — and the concealed trouble came out, as he had expected.

"Poor Rose!"

"What of her?" inquired Raymond.

"She is overtasked, Ray! John is a kind, worthy fellow, but his education did not qualify him to cherish as he should a girl so delicately reared as was our Rose. She never thinks, much less speaks, a word of complaint; but it tries my forbearance sorely to see her fading beauty, and remark how her strength has failed. She is a slave to everybody, husband, child, even to her servant. There she was, pacing the floor, trying to sing to the cross babe that had scarcely been out of her arms the live-long day, looking ready to drop with fatigue and headache. Hetty fretted so that I could with difficulty make her understand my errand, and myself comprehend her refusal."

“She refused, did she?”

“Yes. Keeping but one girl, as she does, the entire care of the child falls on Rose’s shoulders every Monday and Tuesday —”

“And at most other times, too, I suspect,” interrupted Raymond. “To-morrow is ironing-day; Wednesday baking-day; Thursday scrubbing-day; Friday Catherine’s rest-day, a season the ‘misthress’ never had the remotest glimpse of; and Saturday general cleaning-day. It is a shame for a man to impose upon a wife as John Gray does. I would give him a piece of my mind on the subject, were it not that he might accuse me of unwarrantable interference in family matters.”

“John means well,” replied Fanny. “His antecedents were unfavorable for teaching him right ideas of woman’s duties and woman’s strength. He measures our dear, gentle Rose by his mother, whose constitution is one of a thousand.”

“She is no woman,” said Raymond; “she is made, soul and body, of cast-iron. The man that dared marry her must have been brave as Julius Cæsar. No wonder he died young! I should have expired before the ceremony was over, granting that I had survived the courtship. But, to return to the original question, — your girls leave off work at tea-time. Has Rose learned to imitate Mamma Gray so well that she forces the ill-used Catherine to rub at the wash-board after dark? Why cannot she sit by Hetty’s cradle long enough to allow the real servant leisure to take tea here?”

“Just what I proposed; but Rose ‘never liked to ask extra work from the help on busy days, especially Monday.’ One thing I can do — send her a portion from the bountiful supply of dainties with which my husband has crowned my birth-night board.”

Accordingly, while Mr. and Mrs. Gray sat at their early tea, the neat-handed Bessie made her entry, bearing a tray

whereon were placed a glass dish of ripe, odorous strawberries, a silver pitcher of "genuwine" cream, and a plate of frosted cake, with "Mrs. Parkhurst's compliments, and many happy returns of the day."

Rose's face and appetite were alike quickened into vivacity at the sight. The cool, acid fruit was what she had longed for through all the melting day. John had suffered an equal thirst, appeased by sundry glasses of "cream soda, with pure fruit syrups," imbibed unpremeditatedly, as he happened to be passing certain druggists in his street. His wife "was at liberty to do likewise," he would have said, if taxed with selfishness in this particular. So she was, if she had not had the baby to tend, the house-work to do, a cross servant in the kitchen to coax and humor, and if the soda-founts so convenient to his store had not been half a mile from his residence. He was hungry to-night, and, after his wife's omissions in the usual bill of fare had been noticed — attributed to Catherine's "Irish stupidity," and generously assumed by the virtual maid of all work, as she repaired her negligence — he contrived to swallow a tolerable meal, to which strawberries and cream were no unwelcome adjunct.

We have slandered John Gray, if the reader is led to consider him as unkind or unfeeling. He was a thorough man of business, and, apart from his strong affection for his wife and child, he possessed a sterling sense of right and honor, that would have caused him to provide well for his family; to see that, so far as he knew, they should want for nothing. He was not, strictly speaking, a liberal housekeeper, but he was too just to be parsimonious. Rose might have had whatever she needed or wished, for the mere asking; but, with a queer perversity, not uncommon in more courageous wives, the asking was to her the most unpleasant task in the world. We know a lady whose practice it is to lay her empty portemonnaie, its open

mouth testifying to its condition, upon her husband's dressing-case before he arises in the morning ; and she assures us that its mute eloquence never fails to accomplish the desired effect. We know another, whose name we prefer not to mention for especial private reasons (one of which is a praiseworthy fear of tempting the less fortunate to a violation of the tenth commandment), whose drawer is visited — not periodically, that would imply a stated allowance, but at uncertain intervals, always short, however — by some perennial Santa Claus, who, no matter how often he may find leanness and poverty of pocket, never fails to leave a purse like an aldermanic oyster behind him.

To neither of the systems did John Gray incline. Family expenses, including bills for dry-goods and fancy articles, were defrayed by him personally, and he had no suspicion of any use which a woman could, in these circumstances, have for money, unless for five dollars or so a quarter, wherewith to purchase confectionery. Although it has no immediate bearing upon our story, we may here revert to the fact that Rose's private hoard consisted of a forlorn three cent piece at the period of which we are speaking, and that she was no poorer than she had been for weeks.

"Raymond is a good fellow, but disposed to be extravagant," John said, as Rose replenished his saucer with fruit. "Strawberries are dear at this season."

"But how delicious!" answered Rose. "I have not tasted anything so delightful in an age. Then, too, this is an extraordinary occasion — Fanny's birthday."

She did not add "and mine," lest he might imagine that a hint lurked in the sentence.

"Did I tell you that he had bought a horse and carriage?" asked Mr. Gray.

"No ; but they called here as they were taking their first

drive this afternoon. The whole affair was a surprise-gift to Fanny."

"Indeed! She had notified him of a hankering for it, no doubt. Fan is stylish in her notions — rather gay. I trust she will not tempt her husband too far."

"It is her nature to be lively," returned Rose; "but nothing was more foreign to her intentions than to ask for a carriage of her own. Cannot Raymond afford it, my dear?"

"Why, yes; that is, the expense will be covered by his income; but so could I 'afford' a hundred follies which it would be unwise to commit. A young man should lay by something every year — every month, in fact, against a rainy day."

"Raymond has insured his life for the benefit of his family," said Rose, who both loved and admired her brother-in-law.

"True. And if he is content that they will be moderately well off in the event of his decease, it is none of our business what becomes of the rest of his money."

Hetty's fretful cry, at awakening, here summoned her mother to the nursery. Mr. Gray read the evening paper in the snug library, and then went up stairs. Rose was in the act of depositing the babe in the crib. "Sh-sh-sh," she whispered at her husband's entrance, and, as the child's slumber outlasted her transfer, a sigh of weariness, intense and inexpressible, escaped the much-enduring parent.

"You look jaded," remarked John, kindly. "Go to bed early, and get a good night's rest. I have an engagement with a country customer at the — Hotel at eight o'clock, and cannot say definitely at what hour I shall be home. Do not sit up for me."

Rose had been revolving the bold plan of coaxing Catherine to pass an hour in the nursery while John and herself should step in to see Fanny, and thank her for her recent kindness; and the frustration of this simple desire cost her, in her worn

and tired state, a flood of tears as soon as her husband's back was turned.

The outer air was invigorating after the confined atmosphere of the house, and John enjoyed its freshness, as he walked slowly up to the hotel. The engagement was neither tedious nor unprofitable. It was not nine o'clock when the merchant found himself in his own street, and opposite his partner's dwelling. The windows were open, and the sound of merry music rang out blithely into the night.

"I may as well look in upon them," he decided, after a moment's pause. And he rang the bell.

Fanny was at the piano, Raymond standing behind her, singing with her. There was no one else present.

"I called in to offer the compliments of the occasion — to say, 'many happy returns,' etc.," said John, shaking hands with them both. "May your shadow never grow less, Fan, and you live a thousand years!"

"I wish you had afforded us the chance to say the same to Rose," replied Raymond. "We were disappointed that you could not celebrate the joint birth-night here."

"Joint birth-night!" echoed John. "How forgetful I am! It has not crossed my mind before that you were born on the same day of the month. Why did not Rose remind me of it? And that was the meaning of the very proper message Bessie delivered with your most acceptable donation to our tea, Fanny? It struck me as being decidedly Hibernian in its construction."

There was an awkward silence of an instant; John was disposed to be aggrieved at his wife's reserve, and his hosts were sympathizing with her in the causes that had induced this reticence, and marvelling that no pang of self-blame at his forgetfulness worried him. The temporary embarrassment was quickly over, and a social, friendly chat of nearly an hour followed.

"Bring Rose with you the next time you come, and let that be soon," was Fanny's parting request.

"I will, if I can; but she is growing willfully domestic," answered John.

The phrase recurred to him with painful force as he contrasted the exterior of his dwelling, dark and desolate-looking, save for a dim light in the second story, with the light and music he had just left. Rose was asleep, with Hetty upon her arm. So profound was her repose that she did not stir at her husband's entrance. The care-worn lines had not passed from her face, and John stood over her, scanning every feature with a mingling of pity and discontent.

"She might be ten, instead of two years older than Fanny," he said to himself. "She was much prettier than her sister when we were married; but, poor girl! she is not now. What can be the reason that some women break so much faster than others?"

CHAPTER II.

TEN years brought to the sisters larger households and proportionably heavy cares, and to the firm of Gray & Parkhurst steadily increasing wealth. Both families still occupied the houses which were the parents' bridal gifts, but it had been found necessary to make additions, and each had, in turn, received needful repairs. In these alterations, they had lost their original resemblance to one another. The Grays' house was a substantial, comfortable building, with, as old Mrs. Gray remarked, in unintentional plagiarism of Mr. Edmund Sparkler, "no nonsense about it."

"But it isn't grand and pretty like Aunt Fanny's," complained Hetty, her grandmother's namesake, but not her admirer. "Her house looks just like her. Anybody who had ever seen her would know it in a minute. The front parlor windows open down to the floor, and the balcony is all overrun with vines. Her greenhouse is at the back of the other parlor, and is *full* of beautiful flowers; and there is a library, and music-room, and such a lot of lovely pictures, and birds, and a great play-nursery for the children — not a bit like this cramped dingy place" — glancing contemptuously around the apartment. "Mother, is not father as rich as Uncle Parkhurst?"

"If he is, he knows better how to use his money," interposed the grandmother, snappishly. "You will live to see the time when you will thank him for not squandering it in useless frippery, instead of laying it up for his children."

"When will that be?" queried Miss Hetty, pertly. "I am afraid I shall not know how to enjoy it, if I have to wait very long."

"You will learn, never fear! There is enough of the Pier-son blood in you to keep you from tying your purse-strings in a hard knot. If they know anything, it is how to spend money."

Her oblique look at Rose pointed the sneer. It was understood and felt, but the daughter-in-law essayed no retort. She stitched on diligently upon a pair of half-worn trousers—the property of her only boy, the second child, a stout urchin of eight years, who was mending a broken top by binding its fractured parts with twine.

"It *won't* stay together!" he said, after several fruitless attempts. "I wish I had a new top, mother. Bill Ellis pegged this, last week, on purpose, the mean thing! Charley Parkhurst has a beauty, his father gave him on his birthday. He lends it to me whenever I go there, but it looks shabby in a fellow to be forever borrowing another fellow's toys."

"You had better be studying how to save and make money, instead of wasting it." It was the old lady who again assumed the mother's prerogative of mentorship. "A great boy like you to be fretting for playthings like a baby! I am ashamed of you!"

"I am not fretting!" fired up the boy, "and Charley is much bigger than I am—a whole head taller—and he has playthings—a plenty of them!"

"Charley Parkhurst is a spoiled child—the worst playmate you could have! He will make his father and mother see trouble in abundance before he is grown, or I am mistaken. He is completely ruined now. I saw that the moment I set my eyes upon him."

"I say he isn't, either!" said John, waxing hotter. "He is

the best boy in town, and Aunt Fanny calls him a real comfort, so she does ! He minds the baby, and shows Bobby how to ride his hobby-horse, a splendid horse, that was his — Charley's own — when he was a little fellow, and he never grumbled a word when Bobby wanted it — and goes with Rosey to school, and winds silk, and runs errands, and I don't know what not."

"John ! go to play in the yard, my son," said Rose, warningly. "It is very naughty to speak in that manner to grandma."

"What did she call me a 'baby' for, then ; and Charley a 'ruined boy,' I want to know ! It is bad enough to have no fun, or toys, or anything, and to be obliged to split wood and lug coal up-stairs, without being scolded to death every time a fellow opens his mouth !"

"Very well, young gentleman ! Your father shall hear every word of that fine speech when he comes home," said the old lady, reddening with anger. "This comes of your style of training, Mrs. Gray. I must say that I did not expect to be insulted downright by my son's children, in his house, and his wife's presence !"

As she swept out of the room, Hetty broke forth with a torrent of tearful passion, which Rose tried in vain to check. She abused her grandmother under every vile epithet she could muster ; bewailed her own misery and that of her brother and sister in being obliged to submit to constant "snubbing" as she called it ; declared her intention to maintain open war, and to aggravate the enemy by every means in her power ; accused her father of lack of affection for his wife and children, because he had invited said enemy to take up her residence in his house. Here the mother's gentle spirit was aroused to indignation. As calmly as she could, but more sternly than any of her children had ever heard her speak before, she reproved her daughter's unbecoming language and demeanor, and sent her to her chamber to reflect upon her fault.

The nursery having been thus cleared, save of the baby that slept in its crib in the corner, Mrs. Gray could work and think in outward quiet, if not inward peace. The "breaking," deplored by her husband, so many years previously, had continued without intermission. There was a sweet, resigned expression in her face, which attracted the beholder's eye to linger upon its wasted lineaments, and this was the sole vestige of her once fresh and fair beauty.

"Your wife had a miserable constitution to begin with," John's mother informed him, now and then, when an illness of a few days was Nature's revenge for the unreasonable burden imposed upon her energies. "And your children will grow up as good-for-nothing, if you do not make them hardy while they are young."

So, for the juvenile members of the family, were early set lessons of industry and self-denial, such as adults are loath to learn, except when necessity enforces their practice. Rose yielded sometimes; sometimes remonstrated feebly, and, oftener, manœuvred secretly to spare her darlings fatigue and grant them forbidden indulgences, a course that weakened her influence as well as their father's. The elder Mrs. Gray had given up housekeeping, eighteen months before, and signified to her son a willingness to confer upon him and his the benefit of her society and example. As we have seen, the children hated, as much as they feared her, while upon their mother the infliction rested most grievously. Apart from the cares which this addition to her family involved; the restraint upon her will, speech, and action; the petty insults and direct outbreaks of temper, with which her tormentor did not scruple to afflict her, she had the misery of seeing her personal importance diminish in her husband's sight, day by day, and the unbending spirit of his mother work out its purposes, in compelling his respect, and, usually, his obedience. Fanny Parkhurst would, if placed in

a similar situation, have insisted upon her rights, declared her supremacy as the wife of her husband's choice and the faithful mother of his children. Rose's submission was so absolute, so readily effected, that while her mother-in-law despised her as she tyrannized, John suspected neither the subjugation nor the despotism. Immersed in pecuniary transactions, outside of their sphere he knew little, and comprehended less of the workings of his domestic policy. While he imagined himself undisputed master in his house, it never occurred to him that there might be feuds between the inferior powers, and seditious mutterings against these among the governed.

At the very hour that witnessed the storm we have described, he was sauntering contentedly homeward, to dinner, in company with his partner. Both were well-kept men of their age. There may have been a slight tendency to a stoop in John's shoulders, the result of too close application to his pen and desk, and Raymond's face was a trifle more full and ruddy than of yore, but they had reached the prime of life with strength, health, and looks uninjured by labor or time.

"That matter of Wheeler's is likely to turn out well," observed John, complacently. "It was a capital hit of yours, Parkhurst. I confess that I had my fears, at one time, lest your confidence in him might have been misplaced. You have a longer head than you get credit for, with most people."

"I care comparatively little for what 'most people' think or say," replied Raymond, "so long as I am in the right track. By the way, are you going to hear Mr. Everett this evening? My allusion to modest independence suggested a like trait in his character of Washington," smiling as he spoke.

"Does he deliver his oration to-night? It had slipped my mind. It is a mystery how you remember everything. I had not thought of it, but I may go."

"Do, by all means!" urged Raymond. "Fanny and I

heard him in Baltimore last spring, and our appetites were only whetted, as it were. It is a treat, such as few enjoy twice in a lifetime. You will never forgive yourself if you miss it."

"I am not so enthusiastic in my notions as some of my friends," said John, jestingly, "yet I appreciate a really fine thing, after my fashion, and I suppose I am in no danger of being cheated in this case. Where can I get tickets?"

"At A——'s and B——'s, and four or five other places. If the reserved seats are not all sold, you had better secure two for yourself and wife. It will be more convenient and pleasant."

"I do not know that Rose will care to attend," answered John, carelessly.

"Not care to attend! Nonsense!" cried Raymond, indignantly. "The doubt is an insult to her understanding and taste! Moreover, think of the double pleasure to yourself. Much as I crave a repetition of the delight with which I listened to him on a former occasion, I would not stir a step without my wife."

"Circumstances alter cases," said John, in the same indifferent tone; "Fanny and Rose are very dissimilar in their tastes and habits."

Raymond bit his lips to avoid speaking too plainly his opinion of the influences that had occasioned the change in those whose early lives had been so much alike.

"Dissimilar or not, they are two of the best wives in Christendom," he rejoined. "Our good luck in getting them should be a source of lifelong thanksgiving with us."

"So other men think and say, whose companions do not seem to us models of perfection," said John. "Rose is a good, dutiful wife, I must admit, and a devoted mother. She is a thought too indulgent, perhaps; but that is not a singular failing."

"Fanny is a better manager of the young ones than I am," replied Raymond. "She has a way of controlling them which I cannot acquire, study the art as I will. They love and obey her better than they do me, and I admire their taste, the cunning imps! They know that she is worth ten of me."

John shrugged his shoulders. "I begin to believe your account of your native modesty."

"Believe, instead, in my discrimination, if you please. I value a first-class woman when I find her. Solomon spoke very guardedly when he declared the worth of such a one to be above rubies. It behooves us to cherish our treasures with jealous care, for they cannot be replaced if we lose them, John! Is not Rose looking badly? So it struck me when I met her yesterday. Do not let her overwork herself. They will do it, the most sensible of them. I have to watch my wife all the while to prevent her from committing this suicidal mistake. She would think it a privilege to be allowed to carry her load and mine too, to say nothing of serving and pleasing the children. Women have an uncontrollable proclivity towards self-sacrifice. I hardly know whether most to honor or deplore it."

"Rose appears to me to be as well as she has been at any time within the past dozen years," said John. "She was never robust, and she seems more frail than she really is. People of her complexion and organization wear out early. She was too delicately raised. It is a crying fault of this age, the neglect of girls' physical education. Parents seldom acknowledge it until it is past cure."

"So I think; therefore I take care that my girls shall have abundance of fresh air and exercise; encourage them to play with their brothers, and provide inducements for them to be much out of doors. And this reminds me of a scheme which Fanny and I had upon the carpet last night. Our Rosey is

nearly ten years old, and, like your Hetty, is growing fast. I was offered a lady's pony the other day, docile as a dog, and a pretty creature. Suppose we make it the joint property of the girls, and let them ride it by turns? It would do more for them than all the gymnasiums and dancing-schools extant. Or, what will be better still, let us buy them a horse apiece, so they can exercise in company."

"Better set them to sweeping floors, and buy each a spinning-wheel," John replied, with one of his mother's maxims. "Girls in our generation have nothing to do but fall into ill-health. Our mothers found occupation in their own houses, which frightened off dyspepsia and spinal complaints."

"I retort with a proverb you cited just now," said Raymond, "good-humoredly. 'Circumstances alter cases.' Spinning-wheels in private families, in this age of machinery, 'do not pay.' The work which Hetty and Rosey would perform would be the expensive and useless productions of amateurs. While I keep servants to sweep my floors, it is ridiculous for my daughters to perform menial offices. My highest ambition is to have them grow up intelligent, cultivated, lovable women, to marry men worthy of them, and to do their parts towards the moral regeneration of our race; for in this mighty reformation women — rightly so called — are to exert a wonderful if unseen influence. God has blessed me with wealth enough to afford them every facility for the attainment of this standard, and, to be consistent, the intervals between their study-hours should be appropriated to suitable pastimes. Their mother will see that they learn housewifery, and they could not have a better teacher. I do not black my boots or rub down my horse for amusement, and I do not mean to subject my wife and daughters to the degradation of unnecessary drudgery. 'All work and no play' — you do not need that I should repeat the rest of the adage. Come in and dine with us, won't you?" — as they halted at the foot of his steps.

“No, thank you —”

The sentence was cut short by the opening of the door, and an avalanche of clean-faced, smooth-haired, merry-voiced children. “Papa! papa!” was the greeting, and in the hall behind them appeared their mother, smiling as bright a welcome. She nodded a cordial recognition of John’s parting bow, and he had leisure to notice the taste and neatness of her apparel and the becoming arrangement of her hair.

“What a wife-spoiler Parkhurst is!” he said, half aloud, as much to silence a whisper of mournful contrast in his own lot as to express his sentiment. “He is bringing up his girls in the same way, too. I hope he may not find his system as chimerical in its advantages as I anticipate. What wild theories he indulges in sometimes! very fine and very impracticable.”

There were no joyous acclamations as he turned the key in his front door. His wife was in the dining-room always at this hour, and thither he directed his steps, after laying aside his hat and washing his hands.

“Dinner ready, Rose?”

“Nearly,” she responded, hurriedly arranging the dessert-plates upon a sideboard.

“It is high time that it was on the table; I am later than usual to-day.”

And not to lose a moment of his valuable “time,” he drew a paper from his pocket, and began to read the reports of the stock-market.

Rose disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. Susan, one of Catherine’s remote successors, was drawing the meat from the oven, and none of the vegetables were dished.

“Mr. Gray has come home in a great hurry, Susan!” exclaimed Mrs. Gray, catching up a pot of potatoes, and pouring off the water.

This was an every-day story, and produced as much effect as could have been expected.

"Hetty ! Hetty !" called her mother, at the bottom of the staircase.

No reply.

"John, run up stairs, and tell your sister that I want her in the kitchen right away !"

And back she darted to assist the cook, by doing three-quarters of the work herself—a result upon which the shrewd "help" had learned to calculate with such certainty that she would have deserved to forfeit her reputation as a "shirk" (all Mrs. Gray's servants were "shirks," after living with her awhile), if she had not availed herself habitually of this aid.

Hetty came in, slow and sulky, as the last dish was ready to be carried into the eating-room. Avoiding her mother's sorrowful eye, she followed her to the table, where the iron grandmother already sat in stern stateliness.

"Your cook does not improve in punctuality," she observed to her daughter-in-law, the instant the blessing was said. "I am surprised that you keep her. It must be a serious inconvenience to you, and may be the cause of positive loss to your husband. Methodical habits on the part of his family are of the utmost consequence to a business man. I notice that my son is never tardy."

Rose, heated and breathless from her rapid movements in the close kitchen, found her ordinary refuge in silence, and ladled out the soup as fast as her shaking hand would allow. The other courses were served in quick succession, and dispatched in corresponding haste ; for had not Mr. Gray lost ten minutes of priceless "time," in waiting for his "tardy" wife to take up dinner ? If she had ruptured a bloodvessel in her anxiety to repair this incalculable damage, it would have been but an insufficient expiation.

The meal was plain, but good, and all ate heartily, excepting the one who sat at the head of the board. She trembled with

a sickening heart, lest her mother-in-law should execute her threat of informing against her boy, for his disrespectful deportment and words — lest Hetty's lowering brow should attract her father's attention, and explanation lead to punishment for the misdeeds she was ever ready to forgive and overlook. But the chairs were pushed back, the children had withdrawn, and no disclosures had fulfilled her forebodings. With a brief "Good-afternoon," John quitted the apartment in quest, no doubt, of the lost ten minutes, and Rose breathed once — a long, free respiration that heaved a load from her heart. She started with a stifled scream when he suddenly reappeared.

"What ails the girl?" asked the old lady, sharply. "You have given way to these nervous notions until you are ready to fall into a spasm if a pin drops. Are you afraid that your husband will bite you?"

"I beg your pardon!" And Rose forced a smile to her pale lips, as she addressed him. "I thought you were gone."

"There is no occasion for fright at my return, that I can see," he said, drily. "You should try to overcome that foolish habit of starting and screaming out at the least surprise. I stepped back to inquire if you wanted to hear Mr. Everett to-night."

Ungracious as was the invitation, Rose's eye kindled at the proposition. Had John been accustomed to note the changes in her countenance, he would not have paused for a verbal reply.

"Would not you like to go, mother?" she said, timidly, as a second thought suggested the propriety of the appeal.

"No! I would not pay a dollar to hear General Washington himself, and I shall not lend my support to any such humbuggery as this oration. It is a regular imposition to charge so much, and for what? To buy a few acres of poor 'old fields' and a handful of bones! Pugh! There will be

fools enough to fill the house without me. Thank goodness, *my* happiness does not depend upon gadding about to this and that show and sight. In *my* day, women stayed at home, mended their husband's clothes, watched the servants, took care of the children, and left politics to the men. But these proceedings are all of a piece with the rest of the strong-minded doings of the times. I expect to see a woman President of the United States, before I die."

"Well, Rose — and you?" pursued John, smiling at this tirade.

"Perhaps I had better not go," she said, hesitatingly, scanning his face for encouragement to decide differently.

"As you like. I did not suppose that you would care particularly about going, you are such a home-keeper. I shall be up early to tea, and do see that Susan is not dilatory, or I shall lose my seat in the hall. The crowd will be immense, and I dare say you will be more comfortable here than there."

"Where is Rose?" inquired Fanny, as she was jostled against John in the animated throng that poured into the brilliantly lighted hall.

"She did not wish to come," was the ready and sincere reply. And not a regret, hardly a thought, on account of her absence, interrupted the eager interest with which he hearkened to the silver-voiced orator. Her life was of his "a thing apart."

CHAPTER III

"RAY'S" children were always in demand at the old homestead, and this summer the three elder were left there, while the parents made an excursion to Canada, by way of the lakes. "Fanny was getting thin — the effect of nursing that great, fat child all the winter," Raymond discovered, and his love instantly took the alarm. Before starting, he made one more ineffectual attempt to persuade John of the expediency, amounting to a necessity, of recreation for his overtasked helpmate; but was baffled by the same strange carelessness, a dullness which would not or could not recognize any reason in his expostulation.

The Parkhursts were absent three weeks in performing their tour, and spent three more in rustivating among Raymond's relations. Immediately after their safe arrival at home, Fanny hastened to see her sister. We will leave her to relate the substance of what she then learned of the course of events since her departure.

"Would you believe it?" she began, with glittering eyes and scarlet cheek, to her husband, before she fairly closed the door after her entrance. "That wild, dissipated, worthless William Gray has come to life, again, and is actually domesticated at John's!"

"Is it possible! When did that happen?"

"A fortnight ago, Rose says. He arrived late one night, when John was out of town; frightened his mother almost out

of her wits, and shocked poor Rose into a fainting-fit; for, only think, darling! he had an attack of delirium tremens within an hour after he got there, and for two days raved so that they were obliged to hold him down in his bed! Since his recovery, he has had a conversation with John, who proposed to allow him a certain sum for his maintenance in a respectable boarding-house; but he vows that he will not be kicked out of doors like a pauper, and his mother is as determined that if he goes, so will she. It is the only spark of natural affection I have ever heard of her showing, and how unjust it makes her! For love of, or sympathy with this ungrateful spendthrift, whose excesses have disgraced her name, she would fasten an absolute curse upon a dutiful son and his unoffending family! Rose is completely crushed. I never heard her intimate a censure of Mrs. Gray, much less of John, before; but to-day she wept as if her heart would break when she told me how she had gone down on her knees to her husband, and implored him, for the sake of his boy and his innocent daughters, not to subject their home to such a plague as the constant presence of a drunkard and infidel must prove."

"Went down upon her knees!" — Raymond was tramping the floor, scattering chairs and ottomans in all directions as he moved. "I would see mother and brother in the other hemisphere before I would permit my wife to stoop to that! Poor Rose! dear child! suffering angel! Go on, if you have anything more to tell!"

"She said that John was deeply afflicted, almost distracted by her importunities and his mother's resolution; but finally decided that his paramount duty was to support those of his own blood; that it would be unsafe to leave the old lady exposed to William's mad freaks, and unkind in the extreme to desert him because he is poor and unfortunate. Rose says

this is a noble determination; indeed, she quite deifies John for it, and blames her selfishness that will not let her reason her heart into acquiescence. She is afraid of William, dares not remain alone with him for a single moment, or suffer the children to do so. His morose and violent fits keep her in perpetual dread. She was never courageous, and her nerve seems now entirely destroyed. Unless there is some change in her surroundings, I have great fears that she will not live very long."

This apprehension was shared by Mr. and Mrs. Pierson. They had submitted silently, but with inward heartburnings, to the spectacle of their child's privations and trials, and now the cup of bitterness ran over. Raymond's earnest pleadings with his friend were seconded by them, with more heat and less judgment. John, already smarting under the wound to his pride produced by the abandoned course of his reckless brother, irritated by his mother's inconsiderate and violent opposition to his wishes, sensible, withal, that he had acted wrongly as well as weakly in turning a deaf ear to his wife's prayers, was exasperated beyond measure by the arguments and entreaties used to alter his purpose. His interview with Parkhurst terminated in a peremptory command to the latter to "mind his business, and not meddle with his neighbors' private concerns;" that with the Piersons was even more stormy, and was the foundation of a marked coolness on both sides — a cessation of social intercourse between himself and Rose's parents. The old people never came to the house when Mr. Gray was at home, and, while he insisted that his wife should continue her visits to them, nothing could prevail upon him to cross their threshold.

Rose "bore up wonderfully," said her relatives. Even the watchful, affectionate sister marvelled at her stoical composure, and began to believe that the hardening process had wrought

out its end, with such unlikely materials as the tender, sensitive wife. John and his mother congratulated themselves and each other that the family rupture had so slight an effect upon her, both acknowledging that they had expected a storm, instead of the dead calm that had come over her. She toiled meekly as ever through her onerous duties, growing daily more "wilfully domestic," never intimating her realization of the added weight so unfeelingly put upon her; and John, relying on his mother's guarantee that she "would see to it that William's residence with them should not swell their expenses one dollar's worth in the year," instituted no inquiry as to the kind and quantity of the help she furnished to accomplish this end. Rose could have told him, and so could the discontented children, whose murmurs she hushed before they assailed his ears. They saw the keen surveillance exercised towards their mother's actions; her privacy invaded; all her contrivances and expenditures dragged to light, criticized, and condemned; their few indulgences in appetite, recreation, and dress curtailed by the same vigilant and pitiless dragon, and their hearts brimmed and boiled with such passions as youth and infancy should never know.

Heaven is merciful, and to human endurance — even to woman's endurance — there must come an end. Through the tedious, darksome winter, Rose Gray suffered and worked with the fortitude of the Christian martyr who sees the end not far off. Early in the spring, a feeble babe, a tiny caricature of healthy, plump infancy, so puny was its skeleton frame, sent up one tremulous wail in the dwelling of the Grays, one piteous cry, that sounded like a deprecation of life and a prayer for death, and its brief existence was over.

"It is dead!" said the grandmother, in her cold, hard tone.

Mrs. Pierson looked anxiously towards the bed; but the caution came too late, if there had been any disposition to regard it.

“Bring my baby to me, please, mother!” petitioned a sweet weak voice.

They laid it upon her arm, and her thin fingers passed caressingly over the meagre little face. Tears dimmed Mrs. Pierson’s vision, and the tender-hearted Fanny drew back out of sight to weep.

“I am very thankful!” said the gentle tones, weaker and sweeter than before, “very thankful! The Father is good to it and to me, for you know, mother, *it was a girl*, and — it — is — best — so!”

Her head drooped towards the baby-daughter, a fluttering sigh was breathed upon its unconscious brow, and with the mother, too, it was well!

HOW THEY DO IT ;

EMBODYING A PLEA FOR WIDOWERS.

PART I.

HOW HE DID IT.

"HEAR this, girls !" exclaimed Mrs. Waitley to three or four young ladies who were collected about her in her pleasant sitting-room, one fragrant August night ; and she read from the evening paper : " Married, on the third inst., by Rev. J. Smith Robinson, Conrad Elliott, Esq., of Oldport, to Louise Katherine, only daughter of G. B. Sinclair, of this city."

" You don't say so ! "

" Impossible ! "

" Infamous ! "

" Why ! his wife has not been dead a year yet ! " arose in confusing chorus from the horrified listeners.

" And those sweet children ! what a trial for them ! They still talk of their own mother — still mourn her ! " said Mrs. Waitley, her eyes wandering involuntarily to her little Freddy, her first-born, who had fallen asleep upon the foot of the sofa, after the fatigues of the day's sports. " That is the most objectionable feature of second marriages — this installation of a stepmother, who may or may not be fit to have charge of such sensitive little beings as children generally are."

" That is your view of the evil ; but, for my part, I consider

all such unions not merely inexpedient, but positively wrong—utterly inexcusable!” pronounced Clara Mercer, a fine-looking girl, who sat at the hostess’ right hand. “No man who ever truly loved his first wife has a right to marry again. In so doing he must be false either to himself, to his former love, or to her whom he has chosen to supply the vacant place in his home. It was never meant that one should espouse a wife because he needs a housekeeper or nursery governess. Marriage in these circumstances is worse than a mockery—it is a desecration of this, the most ancient and the holiest of human contracts.”

“Hear! hear!” said a manly voice behind the energetic speaker. “Who has, by committing this heinous crime, brought down upon his head the weight of your righteous indignation, Miss Clara?”

Mrs. Waitley’s pale cheek flushed and her eye sparkled with pleasure as her husband leaned over the back of the sofa to kiss her, regardless of the observation of the rest.

“Only think, Edgar! Conrad Elliott is married again! Isn’t it perfectly disgraceful?”

“Something very like it, it must be confessed,” rejoined Mr. Waitley, amused at the earnestness of her reprobation; and taking the paper from her hand he read the paragraph to which she directed his attention. “When did his first wife die?”

“Don’t you recollect? Last January—just eight months since! It seems only yesterday that I attended the funeral, and wept over the motherless babes, so carefully nurtured, so sadly bereaved,” said the tender-hearted Mrs. Waitley, the tears starting anew at the recollection. “And while her image is yet fresh in their minds—young as they are—it is hard that they should be forced to call another—a stranger—by the endearing name of ‘mother!’” If I believed that you could act so heartlessly—so cruelly, Edgar, after my death, I would

pray with my last breath that I might take my darlings with me to a better home."

"Gently, my pet! You are going on at a terrible rate! In the first place, you may outlive me by some dozens of years; in the second, if I were doomed to the misfortune of surviving you, I trust that I know what is due to you, to my children, and myself, too well to select your successor in such indecent haste. Elliott's feelings are none of the finest, I have always thought. He is not one who would be troubled by scruples on this score."

"I blame the lady of his choice as much and more than I do him," observed Clara Mercer, severely. "She had not even the pitiful plea of convenience or expediency, behind which otherwise disconsolate widowers shelter themselves from the just censures of society. Ugh!" continued the young lady, with a tone and gesture of intense disgust — "how I despise the perfidious wretches — practising with crocodile tears and furnace-like sighs, upon the sympathies of credulous, simple-hearted and soft-headed maidens! How any woman of common sense or common prudence can listen to them for an instant passes my comprehension. Still less can I imagine the process of reasoning by which a girl who possesses one atom of true delicacy of feeling or depth of affection lowers herself to the point of becoming any man's second-best love and second wife!"

"Take care! you may live to repent your words!" The caution came from a mischievous damsel of eighteen, who until now had appeared wholly engrossed in the task of dressing a doll for little Susie Waitley, a child of three summers, sitting watchful and happy in the lap of her friend. "I should not be a bit surprised to see you marry a widower yet, and that in less than a year from the period of his first becoming 'disconsolate.'"

"Myra Jewett! how dare you say so!" retorted Clara, half-vexed, yet laughing at the absurdity of the prediction. "What warrant has my conduct ever afforded for your remark?"

"I judge chiefly from your violent protestation that you would act differently," replied the minx composedly. "When you are caught I shall remind you of this talk."

"You may!" Clara promised readily.

"I believe all you say now," pursued the other, "but, do you remember how Hazael asked — 'Is thy servant a dog that he should do this thing?' and became a murderer twenty-four hours afterwards? The race of Hazael's seems to me to multiply instead of diminish. As to men, they are all alike —"

"Thank you!" Mr. Waitley bowed gayly.

"You needn't! I was going to say that if you were ever to become a widower, which Providence forbid! — you would behave as all your brethren do who get a chance to figure in that character. It is a common adage that when a man loses his wife he buries his senses with her, and really I credit it when I witness the fantastic tricks of the bereaved creatures. I am not sure that it is not a fortunate instinct which impels so many of them to rush frantically into matrimony again, since by this means they can recover their lost reason."

"Hit him again! he has no friends!" interpolated Mr. Waitley; then, tapping his wife's cheek — "Come, little lady, cannot you venture a word in defence of the sex?"

"We are not abusing the sex, Mrs. Waitley," said Myra. "As bachelors, they are desirable — as husbands, convenient and comfortable — often rather ornamental than the contrary; — as widowers, they are —"

"Detestable!" Clara finished the sentence, ringing out the adjective clearly and strongly.

"Fie! fie! I would have said 'irresistible!'" said Myra, in pretended horror. "I hope no member of the fascinating brotherhood will ever pay his devoirs to me! 'Surrender or flight' would be the only alternatives."

"I will treasure up the hint, and recommend you to the first eligible widower I meet," threatened Mr. Waitley.

"As you please!" said the unabashed maiden, coolly clipping off a needful of silk — "only, if it is all the same to you, I should prefer that the term of his affliction had lasted longer than that of the latest case that has come under my notice. The unhappy man spent two whole nights in bewailing himself, stretched weeping upon his wife's grave. Upon the third morning he was discovered diligently fanning the damp mound, considering it but decent that the marks of his tears should be dried before taking a second partner to his lacerated bosom."

"Oh! oh!" was the simultaneous exclamation in various tones of laughing incredulity.

"What is the matter?" asked Myra, in mock surprise. "Now his conduct in thus testifying his regard for appearances, strikes me as being eminently respectable. I knew one man who selected spouse No. 2 while peeping around the corner of the handkerchief held gracefully to the eyes at the funeral of No. 1. Still another case — and for the truth of this I myself can vouch, was that of an elderly gentleman, who on being mildly reproved for having contracted a second alliance in three months after the decease of his wife, replied, in innocent amazement — 'Where is the harm? Isn't she as dead now as she ever will be? Will she be any *deader* in three years than in three months!'"

"Don't, Myra — please!" begged Mrs. Waitley. "It gives me a pain at my heart to hear such talk, even while I know it to be the veriest jesting. It is a sad and dreadful thing, this sundering of the nearest and dearest tie of earthly love. I cannot think of it without a shuddering prayer that my husband may be spared to me, and I to him. That there are those who can and do forget their sorrow quickly, and insult the memory of the departed by an early marriage with another, proves nothing beyond the fact that some husbands are not

gifted with fine feelings, or are deficient in affection for their partners ; but we must believe that there are exceptions to the rule. In the event of my decease *my* husband would never so disgrace himself — never put such wrong upon my babes, and there are many others like him.”

No one spoke for a while. The wife’s tone was too full of sorrowful earnestness to admit of further pleasantry upon this topic. At last, Clara Mercer, with her accustomed decision of thought and language, ended the silence : —

“It is a mystery to me how any of them can do it !”

“And to me !” rejoined Mr. Waitley, seriously, and there the subject rested.

The conversation soon passed from the minds of the participants therein ; for within the following fortnight a graver matter interested and saddened all. This was the alarming illness of the most popular member of the little band — Mrs. Waitley. She had complained of a cold and feverishness for some days previous to the evening of the girls’ visit, but on that occasion rallied so far from the languor of indisposition, and spoke so lightly of her malady, that her husband indulged the confident hope of her speedy recovery. The next morning she awoke with hot hands and throbbing head, and coughing hoarsely. The disease gained character and ground so rapidly, that, at the end of the week, it was reported throughout the town where she had resided since her birth — loving and beloved — that but slight hopes were entertained of her recovery. On the tenth day they told her that she had but a little while to live. She met the trial with Christian calmness ; gave minute directions concerning the family arrangements that should succeed her departure ; kissed her babes lingeringly, praying, inaudibly but fervently, as she took a last, loving look of their unconscious faces smiling into her dying eyes ; then lay quietly back in her husband’s arms to await the summons.

Around the bed were gathered other friends, for sweet Anna Waitley was a general favorite, and among these were several members of the merry party that had assembled about her lounge but a short week and a half before. As her eyes rested upon these, once her companions in innocent gayety, lately her affectionate nurses, some vague reminiscence of that last evening of comparative health may have entered her mind to ruffle its heavenly tranquillity, for she gazed up at her husband with an expression of wistful tenderness, not unmingled with anxiety.

"What is it, my own one?" he inquired, in response to the mute appeal.

"*You will not forget me?*" she articulated in feeble accents, yet with perceptible emphasis.

"Never, darling! never!"

Tears fell with his kiss upon her brow.

"Thank you!"

A smile of unearthly sweetness irradiated her countenance — was stamped there, not many minutes later, by the marbling hand of Death.

The funeral over, and the sorrowing and busy friends having dispersed to their several homes, the widower came back to his desolate abode to fold his motherless little ones to his breast in speechless, tearless anguish; and when they had been carried off to their beds, awe-struck, yet wondering in a blind, piteous way at the fearful change that had come over him and their daily life, he watched through the live-long night in the cozy boudoir she had loved and beautified — made to be the very bower of domestic peace — staring in stony wretchedness into the blank, icy darkness of the existence from which the sun had been ruthlessly blotted out at noontide. With the day came the stern demands of external duties, the mechanical drudgery of business, the compulsory association with other men — and he met these with sullen endurance, walking faithfully through

the joyless routine, yet with an apathetic despair that was discernible by the least observant of his acquaintances.

"It was plain," so people whispered pityingly to one another, "that he took this affliction very hard. It was an awful stroke, and had made quite another being of him. It was doubtful whether he would ever be himself again."

This doubt was impressed upon the minds of most persons who came in contact with him. Gloomy, reserved, unsmiling, listless — it would have been hard to conceive of a greater contrast to his former buoyant, earnest self, and the compassionate regards of the community went out, as the heart of one man, towards the stricken household, as represented in him the suffering head. He looked not merely lonely and sad, but lost, bewildered, and wretched, beyond the power of words to express — and he felt all this, and more. His love for his wife had been deep and true, dating back to the girl-and-boy-days of both. Their courtship had comprised all the romance that was to be found in the lives of either; their betrothal had preceded their union by four years, and she had just entered upon the seventh of her wedded life when the fiat of separation came upon them like a thunderbolt from a cloudless sky, and behold ruin and blight in place of smiling serenity and dear delights! At the base of this stupendous mountain of calamity, on the hither side of the grim door, that shut out from him forever the blessed Past, he had dared, in happy presumption, to dream would be continued — a glorious, changeless Now — through the maturity and old age of both — he stood appalled, hopeless, rebellious! He had never thought of Anna's dying — his shocked senses could not comprehend even now the whole might and weight of the misery contained in that one word — "widowed!"

The companionship of his children, which others seemed to expect would be a solace to him, was, in fact, rather an aggra-

vation of his distress. Their artless prattle and innumerable questions about the parent they missed at every turn, sometimes wrought him into a kind of impatient frenzy. Talk with them on this theme he could not, and he repelled them hastily — it appeared to them harshly. Often the very sight of the pair was insupportable to him — recalled the image of the dead mother, as he was wont to see her continually, busied about their welfare; memory rehearsed her tender offices and fond endearments with such cruel fidelity that he was fain to fly their presence, to hide his grief in private.

Two months dragged by, and the cloud abode still black and frowning upon his spirit, unlighted by one gleam of promise. Still he lamented the departed in the wild bitterness of unsanctified woe; rejecting the proffered consolations of friends; seeing in the bereavement the destruction of every mortal hope; still visiting, as the one dear spot that remained to him on earth, the green mound, beneath which he had seen laid to its final rest the gentle head so long pillowed upon his bosom.

One bland autumn afternoon he repaired to the cemetery, intending to pass the sunset hour in its quiet seclusion, in real or fancied communion with the spirit, whose presence and blessing he so constantly and passionately invoked. As he neared the terminus of his pilgrimage, he perceived, through the embowering trees that lined the avenue, the flutter of a woman's robes, at or in the immediate neighborhood of his wife's burial-place. Dreading a meeting with the intruder, he approached her very cautiously under cover of the shrubbery, designing either to drive her away by discovering himself unexpectedly, or to lie in wait near by until she should be gone. A high arbor-vitæ hedge enabled him to watch the movements of the unwelcome apparition — himself unnoticed, even while he stood within a few feet of her.

It was Clara Mercer — his wife's chosen and most intimate

associate — who, kneeling by the grave of her friend, was arranging thereon the contents of a basket of flowers which she had brought with her. It was not unnatural that Waitley's first impulse should be one of fierce, almost uncontrollable jealousy — resentment hasty and high — at sight of other hands than his employed about the hallowed spot, and that these were augmented by a certain angry recollection that he had, upon several occasions, marvelled at the perfect preservation and continued bloom of the blossoms he had deposited above the pulseless heart of the pale sleeper below. It was evident to him now that these had been secretly removed between his visits, and others deposited in the stead of the faded ones. But this emotion of displeasure was transient — gave place to more worthy and softer reflections, when, by a change in her position, Clara's features were brought into view. Her face was bedewed with tears that, ever and anon, dropped upon the leaves and buds she was grouping, obliging her to pause in her task to clear her sight sufficiently to allow her to proceed. Her work done, she remained kneeling by the mound, looking down upon it with an expression of yearning and fondness that went to the heart of the spectator.

"She too is a mourner!" he said, inly. "How steady and strong was the friendship between my Anna and her! *She* knows the extent, the irreparable nature of my loss!"

After laying her hand caressingly on the turf, as in tender adieu, Clara arose and turned to go. Mr. Waitley left his place of concealment and met her at the gate of the enclosure with outstretched hand and a countenance of grateful emotion, which told that the object of her visit was understood. Startled and embarrassed at the encounter, she blushed and tried to stammer some words of excuse for the "liberty she had taken."

He checked her. "There is no need of apology. I beg you to believe that I appreciate and deeply feel the reason why

I find you here. This place is sacred in your sight as it is in mine. I thank you for remembering her, and for the proof of affectionate remembrance you have paid her. She loved you dearly—next to the members of her own family. You have a right to mourn with us!”

Clara’s fast-dropping tears were her response to this speech. The tone of respectful gratitude towards herself—of gentle affection for the dead—of profound melancholy in alluding to his stricken family—sank deep into a heart already softened by regrets for, and dear memories of, her early companion. She was a woman of fine intellect and powerful feelings, but she was not demonstrative of the latter; was regarded in her circle of associates as singularly independent of others’ opinion and esteem, if not deficient in feminine softness of character and manner. Anna Waitley alone, of all her young acquaintances, had thoroughly understood and warmly loved her. Their intimacy had been close and long, extending over a space of ten or twelve years, for both had passed the earlier stages of womanhood.

“She was my best friend. I lost much in parting with her,” she began, but the effort to control herself was insufficient, and she made a movement to pass him.

“Allow me to see you to your carriage!” said Mr. Waitley, yet more gently, seeing her too much moved to sustain any part in the conversation.

They walked, without another word, side by side, towards the end of the avenue, where her conveyance was waiting, and parted with a silent grasp of the hand. There was no one besides Clara inside the carriage, and as the coachman drove off, Waitley had a passing glimpse of her face, from which she had removed the handkerchief. The tears had bathed without disfiguring it, and the blended sorrow, sympathy, and loving

remembrance, depicted in her noble features, gave her an aspect of peculiar loveliness.

"She looked almost angelic!" he said to himself, in retracing his steps to Anna's resting-place. "My poor darling always declared that there were few women like her!"

Then, taking his accustomed position at his wife's side, his mind swung back to meditations upon the magnitude of his grief, and unavailing repinings for the society of his buried love.

A week later he returned, at evening, to the habitation he used to call "home," and going, from the force of habit, to the library, exchanged his boots for slippers, his coat for a dressing-gown, sighing heavily as he did so. Both these necessary articles of fireside comfort were of Anna's manufacture, and, after the manner of most other good wives, she had greatly enjoyed making and presenting them to him. She was continually studying ways and means for affording him additional gratification. He was fast learning to seek out and cherish depressing fancies; his mind becoming morbidly alive to such links of memory as at once hallowed, yet rendered afflictive, the sight of every object associated with his wife, making his misery her representative. It is a common form of selfish and excessive woe. So, yielding to the train of thought suggested or, more correctly speaking, deepened by his unwelcomed entrance into a house where his appearance at noon and evening used to be the signal for general rejoicing, he sat himself down in his arm-chair, opposite the vacant one he would not have removed from the corner where she would sit — watchful of every motion, ready to anticipate every want — in the blessed days of old, and buried his face in his hands, groaning aloud: "O, my precious wife! how long can I miss you thus and live?"

He seldom sent for the children to keep him company at

this hour, although, in former times, he, with Anna, considered it especially the little ones' season of liberty and petting — gave themselves up to the combined amusement and teasing consequent upon the society of these household tyrants. How often he had sat just where he did now and listened to her pleasant tones, repeating to them, as they hung about her or climbed on her lap, the exquisite domestic lyric, beginning, —

“Between the dark and the daylight,
When the night is beginning to lower,
Comes a pause in the day's occupations
That is known as the children's hour.”

It was this souvenir of her — not the desire to have them with him — that caused him to inquire of the housekeeper, when she brought in the evening paper, where Susie and Freddy were.

“They went to ride this afternoon, sir, with Miss Mercer. I thought you would not object, sir?” interrogatively.

“Certainly not,” rejoined Waitley, listlessly. “You are the best judge of these matters.”

“Miss Mercer called by for them,” pursued the housekeeper, upon this encouragement, “and they were so overjoyed at the invitation that I had not the heart to refuse them. They have seemed uncommonly quiet and dull lately, sir — poor things! It isn't to be expected that children will grieve like grown persons. If they are low-spirited long, it is generally a sure sign that they are not well.”

Mr. Waitley raised his head at these words. They were the more worthy of notice since Mrs. Garth was not a great talker, and was usually so much awed by her employer's grave taciturnity as to imitate it while in his presence.

“Do you think them sick, then, Mrs. Garth?”

“Not exactly, sir; but the moping life they have led, since — since —”

"I understand!" interrupted her listener, with a look of deeper gloom, as she stammered for a phrase that should be at once delicate and expressive. "Go on!"

"I mean to say, Mr. Waitley, that quiet and lonesomeness don't agree with them any better than with most others of their age."

"What would you recommend?" asked the father.

"If they were mine, sir, I would let them go out oftener and have young playmates at home," said the good woman, further emboldened by the awakened interest of her hearer. "Ah, Mr. Waitley! sorrow is hard enough for older people to bear! You can't desire that they should understand all that they have been deprived of. That knowledge comes all too soon to every motherless child. The best we can hope for them is to keep it from them while they are so small, and make them happy while we can."

There was no reply beyond a sigh; and after pausing a moment to see whether he wished to prolong the confabulation, she lowered the window-shades, set the drop-light near his elbow, and left him to ruminate upon the hints she had thrown out.

Had his woe, then, been so selfish as to render him unfeeling — blind to the wants and sufferings of his innocent offspring — Anna's babes! Was the deadly nightshade of his sorrow poisoning their young lives? It was a sharp thought — but the pang was a wholesome one, for it was endured for others' griefs than his own.

"I, who should have striven to supply, in some measure, *her* place — to compensate, to the utmost of my poor ability, to them for their great loss — I have withheld from them even a father's love and care!"

He walked to a front window, and remained there, revolving bitter self-accusations, while he watched for the return of the

defrauded children. He had not to wait long, and by the time the carriage stopped he was at the bottom of the steps, ready to lift out its living freight.

"See, papa, what I have got!" cried Susie, gleefully, holding aloft a brown paper package in both her hands; and "Papa! don't you think Cousin Clara bought me a splendid bow-and-arrows!" shouted Master Freddy, forgetting, in his excitement, the oft reiterated injunctions of the nursery-maid, "not to speak loud or make any noise that could worry his poor sorry papa."

Mr. Waitley kissed them both, retaining Susie in his arms, while he thanked Clara for her thoughtful kindness to his children.

"It has been a long while since I have seen them so happy," he subjoined, penitently. "I feel keenly that I have failed in one of the most important duties of a parent — that of rendering his children's lot as pleasant as possible, whatever may be his private and personal despondency."

"I believe that it *is* a duty," responded Clara, more modestly than she was apt to speak in delivering an opinion. "Yet it can hardly be demanded of you just now. It is not surprising that you should, at times, be unequal to the effort of entertaining them. They appeared to enjoy their jaunt."

"And she says, papa, that, if you are willing, she will take us out a great many more times. Wont that be jolly though!" vociferated Freddy, jumping up and down upon the steps behind his father, too full of delight to stand still, as he unfolded the enchanting prospect.

Mr. Waitley actually smiled — a gleam of real amusement such as rarely visited his countenance now-a-days.

"I have no doubt that you think so, my boy! Whether Miss Clara may not repent of her bargain is another matter which it may be well to consider."

"I will take the risk!" she replied. "I may call or send for them again soon — may I not? Are you willing to entrust them to me now and then? I will bring them home in better season next time."

"I am more than willing — I am greatly indebted to you for offering them so healthful a diversion."

"Then children — in a day or two we will have another ride. Good-night!"

"Isn't she a brick, papa?" inquired Freddy, following his father into the house.

"She is a very kind, lovely lady, and you ought to feel very thankful to her," rejoined Mr. Waitley, unable again to suppress a smile at the patronizing manner of the precocious youngster. He set Susie down upon the hall-floor, and bade them both, "Run away, now, and get your hats and cloaks off! I mean that you shall take supper with me to-night."

With shouts of "Good! good!" the children scampered up stairs.

Of late, their father had fancied that he could not support the trial of having them at table with him in the evening. He was always most sad-hearted and abstracted as the night came on, and their noisy prattle about trivial and indifferent things disturbed the sombre current of his musings. He saw them but a few minutes at his hurried breakfast, to which they did not come down so punctually as when the mistress' hand was on the wheel, and he invariably dined down town, near his place of business. His tea was brought to him in the library, and, as frequently as not, went away again untouched. Freddy and his baby-sister were tutored to creep in on tiptoe at bedtime and bid him "Good-night," with faces curiously chastened by the feeling of pitying amaze awakened by his dolorous visage and silent caress. It was no marvel, then, that the promise of being once more admitted to the honor of supping with him,

as well as the influence of his unusually genial mood, filled them with rapture.

They were back soon, hair and clothes in nice order, eager to display their acquisitions. "Cousin Clara" had taken them to a "magnificent"—(Freddy could just manage the polysyllable) toy-store, and there let each choose a plaything. Not without an effort, Waitley examined and admired the doll's bureau, which was a miracle of elegance and utility in Susie's eyes, and gave Freddy instructions in the use of his bow and arrow. The little girl sat upon his knee while the lesson was in progress, her fat, white arm laid over "Papa's" shoulder. When he ceased speaking to her brother, and looked again at her, he met her regards fixed upon him with an expression that thrilled him to the soul, which made him draw her nearer to him—hold her more tightly. How like the daughter's eyes to the mother's! Susie heard the stifled sigh, felt the strain of the closer embrace. In an instant the other plump arm had joined its fellow at the back of her father's neck, and the cherry mouth was pressed again and again to his.

"Dear papa! I love you *so* dearly!"

"And I, too, papa!" echoed Freddy, sliding his rougher fingers into the hand that rested upon Waitley's knee. "And I am going to be a better boy, sir!"

"This is the refreshment I have denied my fainting spirit!" thought the parent, remorsefully. "I have yet something left to live for!"

This was the beginning of a reaction—not violent, but healthful—a change in his demeanor and language which none hailed with greater pleasure than did the inmates of his home. The servants no longer crept about the house like solemn shadows; Mrs. Garth ceased to think it necessary to speak in condoling cadences whenever duty compelled her to address the widowed master, and the children sported, laughed

and talked in rooms, to which the air and sunshine were once more admitted. This altered state of domestic arrangements had, without doubt, a potent effect in winning back the lost bloom and childish gayety of spirit to the orphans, yet some part of the happy change in their appearance and health was attributable to Clara Mercer's judicious kindness. Their rides were a never-failing source of enjoyment to the brother and sister, and these excursions were but one of the many means she employed for their entertainment. Her praises poured from their tongues into their father's ears with an eloquence and constancy that would have won for her his interest and gratitude had she been a stranger. As Anna's best friend, her attentions to Anna's children assumed a value for which common-places of thankfulness and obligation were a poor and unworthy recompense.

Chancing to overtake her in the street one morning, he walked several squares by her side, and said some phrases of acknowledgment of what he felt to be her great goodness.

"Do not speak of it!" she interposed hastily. "Had they no stronger claim upon my notice than their own merits, I could not treat them with indifference. They are most engaging little creatures. It is impossible to know and not to love them. Freddy has in him the material of a noble man, and Susie is the dearest child I ever saw. By the way, I was wishing for an opportunity of preferring a petition to you. To-morrow is Freddy's birthday, and we want him to drink tea with us. Children always expect a treat on birthdays, you know. There will be no party, of course — only my three nephews and their two sisters, to meet your boy and *his* sister, and help demolish the great cake which is an institution upon such anniversaries. I promise to see that there are not too many sugar-plums eaten, and to send your children home in the carriage at nine o'clock."

"There is no need of that ; I will come for them myself," answered Mr. Waitley, on the impulse of the moment. "I accept your tempting invitation for them, and thank you in their name."

Clara looked gratified, but astonished at his offer to call. Since his wife's decease, now four months since, he had never crossed the threshold of a single house as a visitor — had, so far as society was concerned, been a complete recluse. He repented him heartily of his hasty proposal almost so soon as it was uttered, but he could not retract it gracefully.

Even when he reached Mr. Mercer's door on the birthnight, he halted, and held serious debate with himself as to the feasibility of yet changing his plans, and despatching a servant in his stead. The recollection that Susie was inclined to be wilful latterly — that she might be sleepy and cross on the way home, and unmanageable by any one excepting himself, settled the matter finally, and his irresolution ended in his mounting the steps and ringing the bell. More important issues than those which flowed from this decision have often been settled by a more trifling consideration. The parlor was brightly lighted, and the small people were in the full tide of hilarity, playing blindman's buff. At the moment of Mr. Waitley's entrance, wee Susie was being blinded by "Cousin Clara's" fingers. Their kind and cunning work was speedily made evident by the child's careful avoidance of tables, ottomans, and the like stumbling-blocks that beset her way. Her blindness was plainly not of a dangerous type. Her father saw this, and smiled at the tact that allowed the babe a share in the game, yet guarded against harmful accidents. He laughed as the outstretched arms grasped his knees, and a voice shrill with delight cried —

"Papa ! I have caught papa ! What a great big 'buff' he will be !"

Clara interfered with ready subterfuge, and rescued the prisoner, waiving the laws of the play in this instance, and nominating his substitute. She was ever mindful of his feelings — ever quick to avert annoyance and possible pain from him. He took a seat with Mr. and Mrs. Mercer, without the ring of boisterous revellers, and contemplated the scene with a mingling of sadness and pleasure — pleasure in the spectacle of his little ones' happiness — longing and heart-sickness in the reflection of the contrast between this fireside and his own. After all, the seclusion of the past few months had been as irksome as injurious to him, he was slowly discovering — even while he had believed that it was his choice, that his wounded spirit shunned the society of his fellows. He was naturally social in temperament, and had done his moral nature actual wrong in avoiding all intercourse with his friends. He was glad to find that the present exhibition of cheerful domesticity suited his palate better than the very bitter salad of the solitary which had been so long his daily food. He hailed it as a symptom of returning health in mind and heart.

By and by, a tray of refreshments was brought in, and he aroused himself from his philosophical cogitations and went to assist Clara in distributing them amongst the children. It was pleasant to note her management of their caprices ; her manner to them, winning and lively, and exactly adapted to the character and comprehension of each.

"You pet without spoiling !" observed Mr. Waitley aside to her, as Susie, who had set her infantine affections upon a bit of richer cake than he thought good for her, sulked desperately at his refusal, threatened a stormy scene, and only condescended to be appeased by Clara's offer of another less hurtful, yet as palatable dainty.

"That is the secret of getting along smoothly with these very juvenile specimens," she returned smilingly.

Mr. Waitley heaved a sigh at thought of the many times when he was at his wit's end respecting the best method to be pursued with his "juvenile" subjects, dreading to punish with unwise severity, yet fearing lest he should injure them by unreasonable indulgence. He wished devoutly that heaven had endowed him with the gift of "getting along" in such straits.

"But what can a man do?" he asked inwardly and despondingly. "A woman is alone fitted for this sort of work — a woman, and a mother!"

A series of thoughts flashed through his mind with the celerity and force of chain lightning. He nearly dropped the basket of cake in little Winny Mercer's lap, while she was solemnly hesitating between lady's fingers and macaroons. His first earthly duty now was assuredly to his children. They were in a fair way to be ruined for the lack of suitable government. Clara might pronounce them "engaging little creatures," and they sometimes deserved her encomiums, but he could not shut his eyes to the palpable deterioration of character and behaviour in both. Mrs. Garth and the servants indulged them to excess, and he did not spend enough time in the house to enable him to counteract the growing evil. Freddy was becoming rude — Susie pert and passionate. Since a woman's tact and a woman's care were imperatively demanded by their necessities, ought he not to consult their welfare rather than his own selfish preferences, and procure for them such an instructress and guide?

With a deep flush on his brow that looked like anger, he replaced the basket upon the tray, and strode to the other end of the apartment, where he seemed to stare through the window into the outer obscurity, until a musical voice at his side accosted him.

"Mr. Waitley, in providing for others you have forgotten yourself. Allow me to remind you that you are mortal, and

stand in need of refreshment ;” and Clara held out to him a small waiter, containing ice-cream, cake, and wine.

He wheeled quickly towards her ; bent upon her a glance of such eager inquiry as startled and confused her — she knew not why — then recovering his self-possession, thanked her, took the burden from her hands, and set it upon a table near by.

“ And you — are you superior to the wants of our common humanity ? Can I do nothing for you in return ? ”

A rash, perhaps a foolish, impulse had seized him. He was in just the frame of mind that disposes one to trust to luck, and make superstitious ventures.

“ If she accepts anything from me, I shall give this subject further and more serious consideration. If she declines, I will dismiss it at once, and forever.”

In blissful ignorance of the important matter to be settled by her action — thinking to put him at his ease by eating with him — Clara took a French kiss from the plate of cake, a morsel of crystallized froth, and pretended to nibble it, while he very soberly tasted his cream, and tried to discover whether he were glad or sorry that the question was decided in this way. He found himself presently scrutinizing her in a new light. To be sure he had no intention of marrying her, or any one else, at present — the wound in his heart was all too fresh for that — still there was no impropriety in studying an attractive character that might be of use to him some day. Clara would be an excellent mother for his neglected children — there was no room for doubt on that head — but had there been unintentional meaning in her playful address to him ? In providing for others, *had* he overlooked his own needs ? Was it not true that, while he wore the garment of mortality, he was indeed subject to human wants ? that the companionship of a kindred mind and heart ; the many nameless ways in which a woman’s presence and influence in a household are

felt for good ; the cheer and comfort and rest he had once enjoyed so heartily — which he now missed so sadly — were more than desirable ? Were they not indispensable to him ? Without them, would his not be a dwarfed, sickly existence ? Would he not grow misanthropic, morose, prematurely old, a curse to his children, to the world, and to himself ?

What of Clara Mercer's capabilities for filling this responsible post — always providing that he should, upon mature deliberation, determine to elect any one to it ? He saw — not a frivolous, giddy girl, whose chase after pleasure would shock his sense of fitness, and conflict with the matured tastes of a man who had lived in the world for thirty-three years, and whom sorrow had chastened into thoughtfulness — but a well-developed woman, comely to behold ; a lady by birth and education, of strong, well-regulated intellect, and, withal, a large, true heart, whose worth he ought to know, perhaps did know better than any one else now living. What more could he or any other sensible man require ? He would think the matter over.

Little Susie added impetus to this resolution that night.

"Papa," she said, when he bent over her crib to kiss her before leaving her to the rest she needed after her unwonted dissipation, "I wish you would ask Cousin Clara to come and live with us all the time. I *do* love her so !"

"Jolly !" came from Master Freddy's bed — the energy of his assent rendered somewhat less effective by his endeavor, at the moment of articulation, to bolt a mouthful of the apple he had surreptitiously concealed under his pillow for discussion during the night-watches.

"Children are shrewd observers ; their instincts rarely err. There really seems to be a Providence in all this !" piously ejaculated Mr. Waitley, as he summed up the pros and cons of the important case in his "thinking it over" — a process which kept him awake far into the night.

PART II.

HOW SHE DID IT.

"WHERE are you going, my daughter?" inquired Mrs. Mercer, one afternoon a week or so after the birth-day gathering, as Clara entered the apartment, bonneted and cloaked for a promenade.

"I promised to take the children to see the Panorama to-day, mother."

"What children?" asked the mother.

Clara looked surprised.

"Freddy and Susie, of course! Whom else did you think that I meant?"

"I was afraid that your engagement was with them," pursued Mrs. Mercer, with a troubled air.

"Afraid!" echoed the daughter, doubtful whether she had heard aright. "What possible objection can you have to such babies as they are?"

"None to them, certainly! That would be simply absurd. Nor do I affect to question the purity of the motives which actuate you in paying so much attention to poor Anna's orphans; but it is my duty to inform you that the malicious world is already busy with this choice morsel of gossip."

"And what can the world say?" Clara fired up instantly, as a war-horse pricks up his ears at the sound of trumpet. Her disdain of scandal was honest and active. "Nothing worse than that I remember my friends, and cherish whatever was

dear to them, whatever recalls them most pleasantly and forcibly to my mind, while the fashion of the world is to forget friends and sorrow together — that I prefer the innocent prattle of simple-hearted babes to such intolerable and slanderous gossip as is popular among grown-up people! What do *I* care for the world's opinion?"

"No woman can safely set it at defiance," rejoined Mrs. Mercer, in nowise disturbed by this outburst. She was used to her daughter's impetuosity. "I own it has caused me some disagreeable sensations to learn that the current report is, that you are making interest with the children for the father's sake."

"The *mother*, you mean!" corrected Clara.

"I mean just what I say," replied the mother, smiling in spite of herself. "You are a queer compound of wisdom and simplicity, shrewdness and *naïveté*, my dear. I know that your unconsciousness in this case is unaffected, but few besides myself would credit its sincerity. Has it never occurred to you that Mr. Waitley is now a widower, and that widowers are, as a class, notorious for their haste in contracting second marriages?"

Clara's breath came with a gasp of genuine amazement; her face flamed up hotly, then paled.

"*You* will believe me, mother," she said, after a moment, in an agitated voice, "when I solemnly declare that, until this instant, the thought that Mr. Waitley was, legally or morally, free to marry again if he chose, never entered my brain! I have regarded him all the while as Anna's husband, and he knows it! Those are cruel tongues — unfeeling as unfair — that dare to couple his name with that of any other woman. If there was ever a sincere mourner in this deceitful world, that one is Edgar Waitley! His very soul was bound up in his wife, and he will never cease to lament her!"

Mrs. Mercer smiled rather mysteriously — it could hardly have been in mere amusement — at Clara's warmth.

"That may be so, my love. He was certainly deeply attached to her, and she deserved all the devotion he gave her. For both their sakes, no less than for the children's good, I would not have you discontinue your intercourse with the family. Only, I cannot think it advisable for you to appear continually in public as the guardian of Freddy and Susie. It provokes unkind remarks. But have them here whenever you like, and show them all the favor that is in your heart."

The effect of this warning upon a majority of women would have been to produce a coldness and reserve of behaviour towards the man whose name was thus publicly linked with theirs — a frigid coyness that would have terminated the embryo courtship then and there. Clara was made of very different stuff. The more she pondered upon what she had heard, the warmer waxed her wrath against the author of the gossip, and the more fixed was her resolution not to suffer it to affect her demeanor to Mr. Waitley, or lessen her regard for the children. He and they were no more to blame for this idle, mischievous babbling of the world than was she, and they should not pay the penalty which the mischief-makers would be delighted to impose. Matters had come to a pretty pass if she, Clara Mercer, were to be scared from the path of duty and the exercise of simple humanity by the cackling of a flock of geese!

The next day was New Year's Eve, and much of it was spent in getting ready several tasteful presents for her little *protégés*. The most elaborate of these was a small cradle, its furniture and occupant, — designed as the crowning glory of Susie's baby-house. Each of the appurtenances was perfect of its kind, and all was the work of Clara's deft fingers. There were embroidered blankets, hem-stitched sheets, quilted coverlet, and ruffled pillow-cases, and amongst these dainty fixtures was destined to repose a wax doll, more than a foot in length, with real flaxen ringlets and movable eyes. Clara was putting the

finishing touches to the toilette of this infant phenomenon that evening, seated alone in the family parlor, humming a gay tune to herself, and, without knowing that she did so, gently rocking the cradle with her foot, when the door unclosed to admit Mr. Waitley. With a half laugh, combining apology for her occupation and pleasure at seeing him, she arose to receive her visitor. She felt a little foolish embarrassment, which she explained to herself by reflecting upon the ridiculous figure she imagined that she had presented at his entrance, and the heightened color and trifling flutter of manner incident upon this added a charm to the attractive tableau.

For the first time, Mr. Waitley's eyes kindled at sight of her with something strongly akin to a lover's animation; his long depressed and quiet heart glowed with a sentiment of admiration and interest that was very unplatonic in its character. There were live coals left yet under the thick white ashes of desolation. Their revivification was by no means an unpleasant sensation either, and the hand-pressure, cordial and prolonged, which their friendly relations warranted him in giving to the object of his regard, was an intimation, but a very tame one, of what was passing within. Verily, Mr. Edgar Waitley had made wonderful progress in the study, of which the initial lesson had been learned but eight days before! The second love of gentlemen in his circumstances arises, usually, like the fabled Phoenix, full fledged from the midst of the cindery ruin marking the funeral pyre of former hopes and affections. It is a law of nature. Let scoffers be silent, and candid lookers-on do reverence to the beautiful and eternal rule of reconstruction!

The widower sat down beside Clara on the sofa with a graceful assurance of his welcome, and an intention of making himself quite at home — which a bachelor-novice in a like position would have pawned his soul to acquire — made a

comment upon the weather, inquired after the health and whereabouts of the rest of the family, then stooped to lift the cradle to his knee, complimented it and the contents, and thanked her warmly when he heard for whom it was intended.

He was a handsome man, and this evening Clara could not help observing that his attire was unexceptionable. In this respect he had not been very fastidious during his temporary retirement from society. Doubtless the feathers of the newest Phoenix were always glossy to the last degree of sleekness. Yes! he was looking uncommonly well, and he presently made her forget his personal advantages in the more lively enjoyment of his conversation. He was undeniably the best talker, if not the most profound thinker, in the whole circle of her acquaintances. It was very delightful to have such a friend — one with whom she could lay aside ceremony and formal reserves — one so congenial in all respects to herself. She chatted away merrily therefore, plying her needle swiftly while she talked, never suspecting that he silently admired her finely-moulded hands meanwhile, occasionally appealing to him playfully for advice concerning the dolly's finery; revealing in her freedom from constraint and unfeigned enjoyment of his company, the best and loveliest phase of her character. Having scouted utterly and with contempt the idea of Mr. Waitley's playing the suitor to her, or to any one else, it was easy to treat him cordially, to entertain him with a pleasure she had no object in attempting to conceal. If she liked him, there was no conceivable reason why she should not let him know it. A single man would not have attained to this footing in her regard, or been received with like familiarity at less cost than a close siege of at least twelve months' duration. The celerity and ease with which most widowers gain such vantage ground is oftenest referable to their practice of this sort of ungenerous surprise — tactics that remind one unpleasantly of

a wolf in sheep's clothing. True, all is fair in war, but first let war be openly declared.

Mr. Waitley felt that for some time smooth seas and favoring winds were likely to be his, but he was not disposed to reef sail on that account. Holding up to the future the lamp of experience, he arrived at the sage conviction that many, if not most of the ordinary preliminaries of courtship were useless and tedious; therefore it was the part of a wise man, who knew the brevity of life and the value of a wife, to abridge these prefatory measures, so far as was practicable.

They fell into more serious and confidential talk at length. Both Mr. and Mrs. Mercer were away from home, and their tête-à-tête was not liable to present interruption. Their conversation wandered into the Past — reviewing much that was pleasant — more that was sad. Without the remotest design of making capital of a sorrow so sacred, Mr. Waitley spoke more fully than he had ever done before of the horror of loneliness that had oppressed him during the dark months closing the year now so nearly gone.

"It is not the anguish of bereavement alone that has bowed the spirit," he said, "painful to me as was the tearing away of the ties uniting me to her who had grown to be a part of my very life. Had that suffering — present and intense — been all that Providence ordained me to endure in this separation, my manliness would have braeed itself to support the stroke. But every instinct of my nature recoils from the drear and barren monotony of the prospect stretched out before me — the solitary, purposeless journey of life. It is as if our Eden were in an instant, by one breath of the Destroyer, changed into a horrible Sahara. Then there is laid upon me the necessity of bearing all this *alone*! That one word epitomizes the saddest features of this great trial. To live — to labor — to suffer — alone!"

His deep voice, mellowed by feeling, trembled here into silence as expressive. A tear escaped Clara's eyelids, and fell among dolly's cork-screw curls.

"Forgive me for casting the gloom of my darkened lot over the brightness of yours!" resumed Mr. Waitley. "It is not often that I allude to my inner life. I have learned how few, even of those who profess friendship for us, can listen with tolerable patience to the recital of our individual woes. I feel that, sure of your indulgence, I have been guilty of selfishness — inexcusable selfishness — but to no one else have I gone for compassion, even when the aching and longing for comforting words and kindly looks were at their height. Do not despise me that in your presence I have been tempted to unbosom my grief!"

"Despise you! Surely we understand one another too well for you to cherish such an apprehension for a second! I honor you the more for every word you have spoken. If I cannot enter into the secret depths of your affliction, I yet know enough to be assured that it calls for superhuman strength to enable one to bear it and live. If I could only comfort you!"

Her fine eyes, glistening with tears, were upturned to his. She looked dangerously beautiful just then, and her emotion was a flattering tribute to his pathetic eloquence. It would not have been a cross to him, if duty or gallantry had required him, to dry the pearly dew with his kisses; but a realization of their real position with regard to each other withheld him from volunteering to perform the office. He contented himself instead with taking her hand, and, regardless of the fact that dolly's toilette was at a stand-still while he held it, retained it in his as he continued his address.

"You *do* comfort me! From no other source has there flowed into my soul such balm as I have derived from your

society, your delicate offices of kindness, your wealth of womanly sympathy! You have been a minister of mercy to me and to my motherless babes. You have taught me the value of pure and disinterested friendship; for every generous act of yours I have acknowledged as a tribute to her who has gone. I am a proud man — yet, strange to say, the weight of my obligation to you does not oppress me. On the contrary, the recollection of it gives me strength and a sweet sense of peace and joy. You are my better angel, Clara! Who knows but you may have a mission to accomplish in teaching me what is my true place and work in the world which one calamity has shrouded in darkness?"

There! that was certainly quite enough for a beginning! And, sensible of this, he relinquished the hand with a final squeeze — gentle, yet fervent — and was not displeased at perceiving its tremulous efforts to proceed with the unfinished work.

After an interval of silence, spent by him in furtive watch of the flushed countenance that now bent low over her task, Mr. Waitley again addressed his fair hostess. His mood this evening was sentimental and oratorical.

"May I ask you to accept this as a feeble testimonial of my grateful recognition of the good you have done to me and mine?" — a slight pause — "likewise a souvenir of her whom we both loved so well?"

It was a beautifully tinted photograph of a miniature painting she remembered perfectly — portraits of Anna and her two children. It had been Mrs. Waitley's last birthday present to her husband. Clara had accompanied the trio to the artist's at the first sitting, and been present at several others. Her taste it was that had arranged the group — Susie in her mother's lap, and the boy at her right leaning against her shoulder. This was a fair copy of a pretty scene, and the

likenesses were all good. Whence, then, the strange pang that transfixed her heart for one instant as Anna's lovely face, beaming with her own rarely beautiful expression, looked up into her friend's eyes? Did her conscience accuse her of treachery to her dead companion as his wife? or had the germ of a new sentiment been implanted within the last hour — a feeling more jealous than friendship — which, when it should have arrived at its full growth, would scarcely brook the memory of a former love, dust and ashes though she might now be?

Clara put the pain from her impatiently — would not inquire into its origin, nor of what danger it warned her. The present moment was very sweet; she had tasted few sweeter in the whole course of her life; for, as we have said before, there were not many who gave her her meed of loving appreciation. She was not vain or exacting, but she had a deep, craving heart, and what she felt to be justice to herself was as dear to her as to most other women.

"You were very good — most thoughtful to bring this to me," she uttered, still studying the picture, whose every line she already knew so well. It was not easy at that moment to look him in the face.

"I would not have given it to another living being," he said, emphatically. "It was painted expressly for yourself. I felt that you had the best right to it — next to myself."

She asked no explanation of this sentence, and none was offered.

It was time to go. Mr. Waitley had said something that was pretty and sounded heartfelt about her entrance upon the New Year so near at hand, and Clara must respond in like manner.

"May yours be happy — far happier than this one has proved!"

There was a moment's silence, during which she did not

dare to glance at his countenance. Had she done so, she might have been surprised, as he was himself, if the truth be told — she would certainly have been reassured by the apparent ease with which he conquered the rising softness — the sadness that overtook him at this reference to his “irreparable” loss.

“Thank you!” His voice was full of thought and feeling, yet not sad. He moved a step nearer to her and spoke in a lower tone. “It is for you to say how much or how little sunlight will fall upon my pathway.”

There would have been no possibility of misunderstanding this had he stopped here, but he was too wary to frighten the game away while the chances of eventually securing it were still uncertain. Ere Clara’s heart had given more than one startled leap, he went on —

“I have had a delightful evening here. It has been a weary while since I could say with truth that anything gave me delight; but our chat has seemed to me like a return of former pleasures. Will you think me very bold if I solicit permission to come again when I find my own fireside insupportably dreary? — when the clouds gather very closely about me?”

Clara made an effort to appear natural and friendly. It did require an effort, as she discovered, but she resolutely repelled the temptation to yield to ridiculous shyness.

“Certainly not! You have been for years a welcome visitor to our home. I see no reason why your coming should be less acceptable now.”

“Such frankness and cordial hospitality are worthy of yourself. But, while my visits will be to me like green spots and wells of water in the desert of my every-day life, I will deny myself these blessings if my appearance here annoy or displease you in the least. It would be a sorry return for your goodness were I to become a source of disquiet where I would,

if possible, confer happiness. Yet I can imagine circumstances that would bring about this unfortunate state of affairs."

Bewildered, excited, but not disagreeably affected by the whirl of unaccustomed emotions, Clara repeated in unconscious earnestness —

"You have always been welcome. You are still. I can assure you that your coming will never be displeasing to any of us."

She raised her eyes in saying this just in time to see the smile that flashed from his eye to cheek and lip at receipt of this permission — met a gaze — intent, respectful, eagerly inquiring — was it also loving?

Edgar Waitley walked home lightly, swinging his cane and thinking over such happy thoughts, wrapped in prospective reverie so cheering, that he astonished, quite shocked himself by humming a few bars of "Love's Young Dream" — a discovery he did not make until the sight of his own house and the dark windows, where the light never used to be extinguished until his return, let him be out never so late, reminded him of her who had, from that now forsaken chamber, passed through the grim, mysterious gate dividing her life from his, now and forever.

Was he then "forgetting" her? Was there sorrowful pre-science in the dying eyes whose depth of wistful meaning came back to him so often? Had the thought that this separation was for all time grown more endurable of late? Was he reconciled to the thought of leading and enjoying a life in which even the memory of her was to have no place? Did the birth and growth of this new affection, which had shot forth such vigorous roots and branches in an incredibly short time — which bade fair speedily to arrive at the fruition of a happy and successful love — did this presuppose infidelity to the departed one?

"Absurd?" He shook off the icy hand that had seemed to clutch his heart, wiped the cold sweat from his brow, and strode on more vigorously than before. "I have succumbed to the influence of morbid fancies until I have grown weakly nervous. In that blessed home" — he looked up at the calm stars — "where there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, the thought of what is transpiring in this sin-stained world — this sorrowful, imperfect life — can cause *her* no pain. To believe otherwise were to have faith in a vulgar, impious prejudice. Her happiness is safe! Even were she cognizant of my actions, her first wish would be for my contentment and comfort. It was her chief care while here."

He unlocked the front door, sighing, more from habit than sadness. To do so had become a mechanical tribute to the worth of his lost wife. The hall was cold and silent as the grave. He glanced into the parlors in passing. They were likewise dark and chill. In the library the gas was turned down to a point of quivering flame, which an unlucky touch of his benumbed fingers reduced to total darkness. The fire in the grate was black and dead. In groping about for the matches, which were not in their proper place, he bruised his shins against a chair, and, stumbling forward, saved himself from falling by catching at and upsetting a table. As it went down, he felt the spatter of some liquid upon his hands, which, after he succeeded in striking a light, proved to be ink. Books, paper and carpet, had received their share of the same stream, flowing from an overturned standish. Ashes bestrewed the fender and rug; there was not heat enough in the whole chimney to warm his hands.

"A pretty home for a man to find on a freezing night like this! This house is in perishing need of a mistress!" he growled, with a kind of savage satisfaction at this additional excuse for altering his condition — these irrefragable proofs

that any change must better it. "And a mistress it shall have before I am six months — yes ! before I am four months older !" was his concluding vow, as he went shiveringly up to his room. "This sort of existence is slow suicide — nothing less !"

Meanwhile, Clara had put aside the doll's cradle, and, sinking into a low chair before the fire, leaned her cheek upon her hand, and seemed to explore the glowing caverns of burning anthracite with all her might. It was futile to pretend to disguise the fact so palpably set before her — Mr. Waitley was her lover ! — almost her declared suitor, and one who would not submit to needless delays. She must forthwith habituate herself to this novel and unexpected state of things, or prepare to resign him as a friend — perhaps as an acquaintance. It was difficult to make up her mind to adopt the latter alternative. She had known him so long and intimately ; esteemed him so thoroughly ; admired him unfeignedly. He deserved to be made happy ; yet he had suffered intensely. A lonely stricken man, he came to her for solace ; implored her to save him from the abyss of hopeless melancholy ; declared that she, and she only, had the power to chase away the brooding pestilential fogs that were making an unwholesome waste of his best feelings and powers, and to bring back the sunshine. Hers was a missionary spirit ; was not here a noble field for its exercise ? And then there were the children ; could she give them up to an indifferent, probably an unkind stepmother ? She had come to love them very dearly, and they to depend upon her for sympathy and instruction. She had found this very pleasant, for she was not superior to the natural yearning of the woman's heart for a home of her own ; for the sweet, holy loves of husband and children. Coarse-minded men may sneer at, and "strong-minded females" trample upon, this instinct, but it is a seed of God's own planting, and it is indestructible until all else good has perished in the sterile, Heaven-forsaken soil.

If she who hesitates is lost, then was Clara Mercer very near the verge of the precipice when she closed her eyes in slumber that night. She was a girl of true and conscientious piety, and her last coherent thought was a prayer for the Divine guidance and blessing in and upon her decision of this important question — her first waking reflection in the bright morning of the New Year — “I enter to-day upon a new and untried life. This year will bring to me strange and great responsibilities. My Father! if henceforth there is to be committed to my keeping the happiness of others, make Thou me worthy of the trust!”

It was inevitable that from musings such as these, from this spirit of self-dedication to the promotion of others' good, there should be infused into her daily life a softer, sweeter lustre, touching every feature with beauty, enduing every action with a charm hitherto unperceived by those who knew and loved her best. It was impossible that he, whose chief study was now herself, should not be the first to see and understand this; it argued no undue vanity in him that he drew from it a blessed augury for his hopes and desires.

His calls were now made after a style that ill-natured lookers-on denominated “fast and furious;” his gifts — bouquets, music, books, etc. — were graciously accepted, and when he was ready to make a bolder move, he considered calmly and soberly that he had warrant for the step.

One evening — the 15th of January — he drove up, in his handsome new sleigh, to Mr. Mercer's door, and invited Clara to ride with him.

Mrs. Mercer followed her daughter from the parlor when she went to equip herself for the excursion.

“My dear, I do not pretend to control your movements — still less direct your affections — but you are aware, I suppose, that in accepting Mr. Waitley's attentions you are tacitly encouraging whatever suit he may design to offer you?”

She paused, but there was no reply. Clara was seemingly engrossed in the business of lacing her fur overshoes.

Mrs. Mercer went a little further.

"You must bear in mind that you are leaving open but one path which you can pursue with honor to yourself and justice to him."

Clara lifted herself smilingly.

"And have you any objection to my taking that one, mother? If so, now is the time to state it."

"None," replied the parent, taken aback by this direct manner of treating so delicate a subject. "That is to say, none except that which I should have expected you to be foremost in mentioning. To speak more plainly, Mr. Waitley is a gentleman of high character, pleasing address, and ample means; one in whose principles we have all confidence; a friend whom we have loved and valued for years. If he were a bachelor, we could desire for you no more happy lot than a life with him. As it is, I wish that he had not been so precipitate; that he had suffered a longer time to elapse before seeking a second wife. It will create a great deal of talk."

"I do not see why it should. He has a right to manage his own affairs as he sees fit. He best knows his own needs."

"True, my love; but you may recollect that you used yourself to be very severe in your animadversions upon similar conduct in others."

"Was I? Then I acted very foolishly; meddled with what did not concern me, mother, and I am ashamed of it. As to the matter before us, and the world's objections to it, Mr. Waitley and I must get over censure and criticism as we best can—must meet and brave it, if need be. Perhaps after all you are wasting your solicitude, and I my courage. Your premises may be erroneous."

In her heart she had no faith in this latter clause. She had

expected as surely the declaration to which she listened that moonlight night as if she had reposed implicit confidence in her mother's prophecies.

Waitley pleaded his cause well.

"Clara! my home is desolate — my heart an empty nest, from which all pleasant and dear loves have flown, and the snows of winter have fallen heavily into it. Will you be the light and comfort of that home? Will you bring to that heart the warmth and bloom and brightness of a second spring? My children are growing up neglected, uncultivated — *motherless*! Will you be their salvation?"

Clara was a tolerable student of human nature, yet it did not occur to her that this moving address was artfully contrived to appeal to her compassion, a plea in the name of humanity, rather than the outpouring of a manly devotion, imploring reciprocation as the dearest good earth had in its gift. It is to be presumed that her obtuseness on this head is largely shared by others of her sex, if we are to judge from the tenderness of pity and the eagerness to console manifested by most women who are thus approached by widowers. The sad and seeking brotherhood invariably consider this lugubrious strain the most effective they can employ.

"Your happiness and the well-being of your children are very dear in my sight," commenced Clara, frankly, yet tremblingly. "But, even could I divest myself of the conviction of my incompetency —"

He could not allow her to hesitate one moment on that score — he interrupted her to remark. He would be guarantee for her eminent fitness for the station he entreated her to accept.

"You are scarcely an impartial judge," replied Clara, half laughing. "But suppose we waive this point, I nevertheless hardly dare entertain your proposition at present. Would it not be expedient for us to postpone its consideration for a time?"

“Why?”

He was determined that she should be definite. His accent betrayed no suspicion of the real character of her reason for the suggested delay. Remembering her favorite adage, that the straight course was always the safest, she summoned courage to say —

“Your bereavement is of such recent date —” there, bravery evaporated in an inarticulate murmur.

He kindly came to her relief.

“Is it, then, your opinion that love in the human heart requires a certain specified and unvarying number of months for legitimate growth and ripening? Especially in a case like the present, where two have known one another intimately for years; studied each the other’s disposition, habits, and tastes in the most favorable circumstances that could be afforded for such investigation; found so much that mutually attracted and interested them in one another — is a formal and strict attention to prescribed times and seasons binding upon them? If so, by what code is this imposed? I find no doubt in my heart. I know and feel that I have chosen wisely and well in all respects. If you require more time and opportunity for maturing an opinion as to my merits, far be it from me to refuse you all, or anything that you ask! Is this your argument for delay?”

It was a cunning snare, and Clara walked right into it — planted her cautious feet directly upon the limed twig.

“Indeed I had no such meaning!” she responded, in imprudent haste. “What I would have said was this — are you prepared to encounter the thousand-and-one ill-natured comments upon your conduct that will be rife when it is known to a certainty that — that —”

Another break-down!

“That I have dared to take into my hands the management

of my personal affairs?" Waitley coolly supplied an ending for the incomplete sentence. "Surely, Clara, you and I are too well acquainted with the proper value of the world's verdict to give it an uneasy thought, much less to let the fear of it cause us to swerve a hair's breadth from what we conceive to be the course of right—the road that leads to happiness! I do not affect ignorance of the popularly-received notions with regard to the measure which I am now contemplating; but I calmly assume my right to the possession of the best and truest knowledge of my heart-needs and the means of satisfying them."

"Just what I said to mother!" thought Clara. She said aloud, "That seems reasonable, certainly—only, fault-finders are seldom reasonable."

"Their cavils are entitled to the less respect on that account. I have no fear of them. Their loudest outcry will be my want of respect for the dead."

Clara started at the composure with which he brought out this, to her, most delicate topic.

"And that will be the accusation which will wound most deeply," she replied.

"Not at all! I point proudly to my Past, and defy the most censorious to find one flaw in my treatment of the wife whom I have lost. To her, I was faithful in thought, word and deed, unto death! There is no law, human or divine, that forbids me to supply her place in my heart and home, whenever, and by whomsoever I choose. I have no patience with this empty, senseless babble about a 'decorous show of respect for the departed.' It is arbitrary, preposterous, irrational, to say to all men who have been thus left lonely,—men of different temperaments and outer circumstances—'Thus long shall you wear the badge of mourning; thus long walk the earth solitary, homeless, comfortless; since Heaven has smitten you to the ground, we—the wise lawgivers of

society — Mrs. Grundies all — decree that you shall lie there, biting the dust in agony, refusing to be comforted, until we grant you leave to arise! Eighteen or twelve months hence, you may do that, with perfect propriety, which it would be revolting to our refined sensibilities for you to mention now!’

“No — dearest Clara! his is the nobler nature that spurns such mawkish and puerile conventionalisms; that arises purified and stronger, from the trial that was designed to cleanse and elevate, and takes his place again in the ranks of the world’s workers; thinking it neither sinful nor inexpedient to accept such new duties, responsibilities and joys as the hand of Mercy shall bestow, as the voice of Duty shall enjoin upon him!”

He considered that he had argued with such exceeding pertinence and force, that he was almost disposed to be vexed that she still hung back. Convinced, she owned herself to be, yet she remained irresolute. By the white moonbeams, he could discern her features upturned to the glittering heavens, — thoughtful, perplexed — more than perplexed — anxious. By and by, he coaxed her to confide the trouble to him.

“It is weak and foolish, I know, and it may be wrong to brood over the thought as I do,” she said, in a timid undertone, “but the question arises pertinaciously in my mind — what would Anna have said, had she foreseen all this?”

She feared lest she had shocked or displeased him, but he met the question promptly — confidently.

“She loved us both. Could your appeal be made to her, she would reply that her constant desire was, and ever would be, for our highest happiness. If we find this in one another, we, in one sense, accept it as a gift from her hands. So far from this action of mine signifying disrespect to her memory, I pay her the greatest compliment in my power to offer. She made my home so lovely, that I find it intolerable without the reign of influences akin to those she exerted. In teaching true

delight to be found in a union of hands, hearts and souls, she unfitted me utterly for a return to a single state. Progress, and not retrogression, is the law of the enlightened heart, as well as the cultivated intellect."

With this choice bit of metaphysical cant, he stayed the discussion for some moments. They rode on silently over the sparkling snow-crust, the same that spread untrodden and level above Anna's burial mound; the fast beatings of their hearts keeping time to the tintinnabulation of the sleigh-bells. Below the cold, white garment of the earth was quiet, darkness, insensibility; above — life, labor, love!

"Clara!" A hand sought hers in firm, close clasp. "Shall we not let the dead Past bury its dead?"

After all — was there not a touch of bitter and truthful sarcasm in Myra Jewett's story of the elderly gentleman's wondering defence of his hasty marriage; to wit, that the dear deceased "could not be any dead."

They were married in May — quietly and without any ill-judged parade of festivity, yet the obstinate, "irrational" world, refusing to be converted from the error of its ways of thinking, by the unanswerable arguments cited above, wagged its hundred tongues vociferously and venomously over the "indecent haste," and "outrageous levity of conduct," and "total want of feeling" displayed by the happy pair; clamor, that made itself heard in the sacred recesses of the Paradise regained, where Mr. Waitley was forgetting former grief in present bliss.

"How can people say such cruel things!" complained Clara to Myra Jewett, one day, during the first quarter of the honeymoon. "You may not have heard that I went with Edgar, last week, to see the monument he has just had erected over poor Anna's grave. It was a melancholy visit to us both, and we never imagined that any one could be so unfeeling, so hard-hearted and unjust, as to ridicule our errand thither. Yet —"

would you believe it? several persons have made themselves very merry over it, and others pretend to discover great indelicacy in his conduct, and gross hypocrisy in mine!”

Myra endeavored vainly to look serious.

“Excuse me, Clara, but disinterested spectators will view everything pertaining to a second marriage in an uncharitable light. It is not until the case is brought home to one, that he or she can understand aright how these affairs are managed.”

Myra was assuredly learning discretion. This was further evidenced by her reticence with regard to another trifling circumstance, that tried sorely the feelings and temper of the bride. On the wedding-day, there had arrived among Clara’s bridal gifts, an anonymous package, which being opened by herself, was found to contain a tiny box. Inside of this was a slip of paper, bearing these significant words —

“Why beholdest thou the mote which is in thy brother’s eye, when, behold! a beam is in thine own eye?”

Edgar said truly to the discomfited recipient of this nauseous pill of truth, that the squib was beneath her notice, but it was not soon forgotten by either of them. Only Myra guessed the author of the unfair attack, and she kept her own counsel. She had chanced on a former occasion, to see a note written by Mrs. Conrad Elliott, the lady whose marriage with a widower had elicited Clara’s spirited sentence of condemnation, as recorded in the earlier portion of this history. This text was in the same hand, despite a poor effort at disguise, and Myra rightly interpreted it as a saucy and unkind fling at one whose fault was the very common failing of both man and womankind — the non-agreement of theory and practice.

Before Susie’s new year’s present was, by dint of unlucky and accidental falls, injudicious ablutions, and well-meant, but ruinous warmings before grates and above the kitchen-range — gathered to the vast, multitudinous generations that had

previously lived through the ephemeral existence appointed to dolls, there was a new claimant for general favor in the household; what its wide-eyed sister called "a real live baby," in contradistinction to her bloodless and inanimate nurslings; a pink, plump, piping bantling, to whom the parents, consistently carrying out their design of rendering respect to the departed mistress of the home, and associating her, in the eyes of the world and their children, with the living wife and mother — gave the name of "Anna Clara."

"For you know," said Freddy, confidentially to Myra, "this isn't our *very own* mamma. Papa gave us this one because the other one died; and I guess if Cousin Clara — mamma I mean — were to die, he wouldn't be very long in finding another. He's a jolly smart fellow — papa is!"

Which observation, the amused Myra considered as a tolerably fair setting forth of the parental doctrine — "Progress, and not retrogression, is the law of hearts!"

A HASTY SPEECH, AND WHAT CAME OF IT.

CHAPTER I.

“I HAVE been convinced for six years that we could never be happy together, and this fresh outbreak only confirms me in the opinion that the less we see of one another the happier we shall be.” And, having given utterance to this sentence with the deliberate and emphatic manner of one who enunciates a carefully weighed and important conviction, Mr. Roger Harrison lighted his cigar and left the house, shutting the outer door with more vehemence than was altogether consistent with his assumed calmness, while the wife sank stunned upon a low seat, and buried her face in her hands.

It was a little spark which had kindled this formidable conflagration of domestic strife, where such misadventures were, happily, not of everyday occurrence. Mrs. Harrison had had “a bad night” with her teething babe, and, coming down rather late to breakfast, unrefreshed and neuralgic, found her lord in a state of excessive irritation over two annoying *contretemps*; No. 1 being the theft of his morning paper from the front steps, perpetrated by some mischievous boy, or penniless and news-hungry passer-by; and No. 2 the tardiness of the cook, there being as yet no signs of breakfast beyond the cloth and empty tea-service. He might have borne either of these trials singly, for the paper would have beguiled the time left hanging on his

hands by the cook's fault, or *vice versa*, the breakfast partially consoled him for his compelled ignorance of the military "situation." Combined, they were fairly exasperating, as all masculine bipeds will confirm me in saying. Mrs. Harrison received his anathemas of thief and servant, and, without responding, hastened to the kitchen, admonished the delinquent of the lateness of the hour, and plunged her own fair hands into the incomplete preparations for the repast. She beat up the omelette, stirred the batter for the cakes, settled and poured out the coffee; then followed the dishes into the dining-room, flushed and wearied, with sharp flashes of pain through her head and face, that were not conducive to patient cheerfulness.

"I hope you gave that lazy-bones a good scolding!" said the master of the house, when they were seated.

"I told her that she was not punctual to-day, and that the same thing must not occur again," said the wife, briefly. Like most other housewives, she had a theory of her own as to the government of servants, and did not like to be interfered with, even by her husband.

"Humph! Your wonderful tenderness to your girls is one reason why they never, by any chance, mend a bad habit. That Ann has breakfast half an hour behind time nine mornings out of ten. If you would let me give her one good blowing up, I venture to say she would change her ways."

"Indeed, Roger, you go entirely too far! Why do you use such sweeping terms in speaking of a slight fault? Ann is only fifteen minutes late this morning, for the first time in a fortnight, and I have no doubt there is some cause for it. The fire is refractory occasionally, or some unavoidable accident puts her back in her work. Then she is subject to violent sick headaches, and may have one now. Let us judge charitably!"

"Where the charming Ann or lovely Katy is concerned!"

returned Mr. Harrison ironically. It is not natural for men (or women) to take kindly to contradiction, particularly if the facts are in favor of their opponent. "The truth is, Jessie, that you *dare* not reprove either of the precious pair, for fear of being left in the lurch at an inconvenient moment. Half—yes, three-quarters of the women in the land are under the thumb of their servants, and you are as very a coward as any of them. I would not be so much at the mercy of a 'sub' for ten thousand dollars!"

"Roger! you astonish me! When everybody says that I have the best girls in the city! And you said, only yesterday, that they were invaluable—so honest, faithful, and respectful! You have praised my management of them a thousand times!"

"Don't recollect it!" said Mr. Harrison, stoutly, helping himself to a second supply of the light, rich omelette.

The hot tears flowed up to his wife's eyes, but pride drove them back. "At least," she commanded her voice to say, "I have the common justice and common humanity to bear in mind that they are fallible mortals like myself, and, therefore, subject to err at times. I make it a rule never to condemn them unless I am persuaded, after examination of the circumstances, that the misdemeanor was wilful, or the consequence of inexcusable negligence."

"I wish you would carry the same excellent principle into practice in your intercourse with others—your husband, for example. My sins are always of the unpardonable type, by your showing."

Jessie hung her head, and was silent. She drank only a cup of tea for her breakfast, and Roger finished his rapidly after the conversation ceased. The reader must not write down the last-named participant in this lively skirmish as a cross-grained brute. He was, in the main, a kind, good-humored, and very

affectionate husband ; but his temper was, at times, somewhat quick, and, being endowed by nature with an abundant flow of language, his tongue was apt to outrun even what was dictated by excited feeling.

He had left his watch in his dressing-room, and, going up to get it, espied through the door of the adjacent nursery, Roger, Junior, fresh and glowing from the bath, sitting, half-dressed, upon his nurse's knee. The temptation was irresistible to snatch up the laughing rogue, give him a toss or two in the air, and half a dozen kisses. Then Miss Tilly, two years the boy's senior, must have her speech of "papa ;" and when he finally succeeded in extricating himself from the mesh of small arms and legs woven coaxingly across his path, Mr. Harrison ran down the stairs, his ill-temper all forgotten, himself smiling and happy, quite ready to kiss his wife and be off to his store, without once recollecting the disagreeable "tiff" with which the day had begun. The whole affair was brought back, however, when he opened the parlor door and saw Jessie standing by the hearth, her head bowed on the mantel in an attitude of pain or dejection. Resolving to go pleasantly through his formula of leave-taking, he came up alongside of her, buttoned up his greatcoat, and reached over her to take a cigar from the case on the mantel. This movement failing to change her position, he put the weed between his teeth, and said, in a style that was a little too off-hand to be quite easy : —

"Any commands, Jess?"

"No, I believe not," was the listless rejoinder.

Mr. Harrison bit off the end of his cigar, and spat it out audibly. "What ails you *now*?" he interrogated, temper giving way.

"Nothing!"

"I understand! I shall have to pay penance for the next four weeks, for a single thoughtless speech. I am growing

sick to death of these eternal squabbles, and their invariable consequence — your sullen coldness. If you had the least regard for your husband, or desire to retain his affection, you would try and overcome this infernal” — I am ashamed to write it, polished reader, but he *did* say it! — “this infernal habit of sulking upon the least provocation.”

Jessie neither moved nor spoke. Her face was averted, or the tears stealing slowly down her pale cheeks would have explained, in part, why she did not attempt a reply to these charges.

“But I shall get used to it by and by!” continued Roger, irritated still further by what he imagined was stubborn anger, or intentional disrespect. “It produces less and less effect upon me at each recurrence of these scenes — unless it be that my contempt is augmented as regard wanes. Have you nothing to say to me before I go? — not even ‘Good-day?’”

Still no answer.

After a minute of impatient waiting, Mr. Harrison removed his cigar from his lips, that he might speak with more dignified distinctness, and delivered his vexed spirit of the sentence recorded at the head of this chapter, with what immediate outward effect we have seen.

Jessie did not weep when he was gone; the shock had stayed the tears; but there was a terrible physical heart-ache, as if a knife had been buried to the hilt there, and a sense of suffocation in her throat which tears would have relieved. Six years! and she had been married to him only six and a half! He had, then, ceased to hope for happiness with her within a few months after she gave herself to him for life! When Baby Jessie was born, and the proud father insisted upon calling her for her mother, “the dearest, sweetest pet name in the language!” he had said, kissing his wife, as her feeble head rested upon his bosom, and she wondered if woman were ever so happy

and blessed before ; when, after a week of fever and wild wanderings of mind, she heard, as in a trance, the physician say, "She knows you, Mr. Harrison ! I think all will be well yet !" felt the strain of Roger's enclasping arm and his tears falling fast upon her brow ; and, as her eyes cleared, looking into the dear face, saw it haggard with watching and woe — even *then* it would have been a blessing to him had she never lived through the fearful struggle that gave his first-born to his embrace, or, surviving that, had never awakened, in this life, from that dark fever-dream !

Six years ! Within that time, Baby Jessie's trial steps had been checked at the little swell of green turf, watered so often since by the tears of both parents ; her sweet prattle hushed forever, save in the sad echoes that must always resound in the one empty chamber of the mother's heart. How kind he was in those dreary days of desolation ! how watchful of her every look and motion ; how fond was his reassurance that this bereavement had drawn his heart nearer to hers — made the surviving Jessie tenfold dearer to him ! Yet, all the while, he was "convinced" that she could never bring aught but sorrow to him ; that his days of happiness were at an end ; that they would be better off asunder ! It would have been well for both of them had she laid down in the grave with Baby, and let them heap the cruel clods of separation upon her, too ! When Tilly, and afterwards Roger came, their father said that he had no more to ask of Heaven. How beautifully and feelingly he had spoken, and, in his absence, written to her, of the "dear love-nest, with its birdlings, towards which his heart was continually turning, with longings unutterable and joyful hope !" He meant it all in kindness, but he had deceived her. Or — and at the thought a great, tearless sob leaped from her lips — it may have been the relief he felt in being rid of her presence that lent buoyancy to thought and vigor to language. Not a

very philosophical hypothesis this, but she was in no mood for coherent reasoning.

Six years! During that time had come that terrible crisis in the financial world, when, day after day, he labored to avert disaster from his new and growing business, and often lay awake through the whole night, she keeping vigil with him, perplexing his brain with ways and means for piloting his barque through the storm. How hard and long she argued and besought to induce him to use her little fortune — the legacy of a few thousands secured to her at his request! And when he at last yielded, and accepted the sum “as a loan,” so he would have it, and she did not care, so long as he took it, she fairly wept for joy at the idea of helping him. One bright, glorious, ever-to-be-remembered day, the very whitest in all her calendar, he came home, and told her that he was safe, that the worst was over, and he in comparatively smooth seas again. Kissing her hand, over and over, he had said, his eyes glistening and lips quivering with grateful emotion — “Dearest, best of wives! my angel of deliverance! I was drowning, and these little fingers saved me!”

She *had* tried to be a good wife. She counted nothing a hardship that she could do or suffer for his sake. She had taken great pride and pleasure in making his home pleasant and beautiful, in preparing his favorite dishes, wearing the dresses he liked, in making herself look pretty in his eyes. She cared nothing for the applause of the world; her home was her sphere, and he was her master. But all her pains and hopes had been thrown away. He had said plainly in an angry, and therefore a truthful moment (O Jessie! what logic!) that she was careless of his comfort, his happiness, and his affection; that he had an ill-kept house and a sulky wife, that his only remaining hope of obtaining a tolerable share of peace and ease lay in shunning her society as much as possible! She had not deserved this!

Her spirit rose indignantly at the injustice of the sentence. She did not deny that she had temper ; but so had Roger, and in their little differences of opinion he as often spoke with undue heat as did she — heat she had hitherto forgiven and forgotten, as she supposed he had her injudicious or peevish utterances. But *this* could never be forgotten — never ! Each word was a drawn sword, and the stabs must bleed while life and reason continued. She could never feel or act towards him again as she had done.

Then arose a startling question. Now that the veil of concealment was rent, and she knew in what position she stood before him, could she — ought she to continue to eat of his bread and share his roof ? She, the despised claimant upon his charity ? While she believed that she contributed to his well-fare and delight, it was sweet to linger near him, and dependence was a thing unthought of — but one scathing sentence had changed everything. She would leave him ! would no longer offend his sight, would disappear from his existence like a cloud that left no trace behind. True, she had no means of subsistence, she had given him her little all of worldly wealth, but she could work for her daily bread. Better beg it from door to door than to accept it from him ! She was growing momentarily more bitter. After all, what right had he to assume such lordly airs ? to hector and criticize her as he had said she “dared” not her servants ? as she would scorn to speak to the lowest menial ! He had not stooped in marrying her. She was young, and beloved, and courted when he first knew her ; his social equal in all respects ; as well born, and bred, and educated as himself, and, in point of fortune, his superior. *Then* he sued for her favor as for the choicest gift in the universe. Now, when she was his, bound to him for life, completely in his power, with no other protector near, he spurned and insulted her ! It was unmanly, base, inhuman !

And she would be the degraded wretch he chose 'to consider her if she submitted tamely to such usage.

Ah, Jessie! you were never about worse work than while you cowered in that corner, making out your strong case against him you had promised voluntarily to serve and honor!

Meanwhile, the nurse had finished Roger's toilet, and, after waiting vainly for her mistress to relieve guard in the nursery, ventured down to the parlor, leading Tilly, and carrying the boy in her arms. She stopped short at sight of Mrs. Harrison's bowed figure.

"Mamma!" called the children, in concert.

She raised her face, and its look of wearied suffering alarmed the maid.

"Is it your head that's bad, ma'am?" she asked, in affectionate respect that spoke well for her and her mistress.

"Yes, Katy. You are waiting for your breakfast, are you not? Leave the baby with me."

"I'm thinking, ma'am," pursued the girl, "that you are not able to be troubled with him; and maybe I'd better take him down to get his breakfast with his sister. He'll be not the least bother in the world to me."

"Oh no! You may put him down here upon the floor. I will look after him."

Visibly reluctant to obey, the nurse set the toddler upon the carpet, and withdrew with Tilly, enjoining the lusty year-old not to "distress his poor mamma's head, but to be a little lamb."

Between creeping and walking, the boy gained his mother's knee, and, glancing merrily up into the sad eyes, repeated the first word he had ever learned, "Mamma!"

"God help me!" ejaculated the unhappy woman, catching him up, and covering his face and neck with passionate kisses. "I forgot my children. I must be nearly crazy!"

She must stay with them ; there was no escape from that obligation, nor had she the strength to leave them. For their sakes she would endure, as best she could, what she had wrought herself up to view as a hateful thralldom. " But, at any rate," she thought, gloomily, " there need be no further pretence of affection." Such demonstrations from her would be a shallow mockery, difficult and odious of performance, and easily penetrated by her husband. Since she must remain his slave, she would perform every jot and tittle of the service the bond required her to show her owner ; but human law had no jurisdiction over the heart.

Ere she arose from her seat she had marked out her course, matured a settled and consistent plan of action ; without a tear had sternly pulled down Love from the throne where he had ruled as dictator for so many peaceful, golden years, and in stalled Duty, grim, rigid, and joyless, in his stead.

CHAPTER II.

UNCONSCIOUS of the revolution going on in his home, in blissful ignorance of the important change in the ministry of the heart whose loyalty to himself he had had abundant means of proving, Mr. Harrison went through his day's work with his accustomed energy and ability ; joked with his partners and customers, directed his clerks with the good humor that made him their most popular employer, ate a comfortable lunch at the coffee-house, with a keen appetite, taking this opportunity to read a copy of the paper feloniously abstracted from his threshold that morning ; in short, behaved as little like a man with a weight upon his mind and conscience as it is possible to imagine. Nor was he oppressed by any such burden. After the fashion of angry people, he had said what he never thought or meant ; used language he would have taken his oath, the next hour, had never passed his lips.

Never dreaming, therefore, that his Jessie had spent a whole forenoon in branding the, to her, dreadful words upon her memory with the red-hot iron of anguished repetition, he set his face homewards in the evening, at peace with himself and the world, and thinking pleasedly of the meeting with wife and children. He was disappointed that Jessie was not in the hall to greet him, as was her habit, so soon as she heard his key turn in the lock, and bounded up stairs with a dawning apprehension of sickness or other calamity. Roger, Jr., was about in the same condition as when his papa had parted from him in

the morning, with the difference in the circumstances that the process of *undressing* was now going on, and the blue eyes were foggy with sleepiness. Tilly ran to her parent with a mouth pursed up for a kiss, and her he questioned as to his wife's whereabouts.

"What has become of mamma, my daughter?"

"She is in the parlor with Miss Jordan. I wish she'd go away."

"Amen!" responded Roger, inwardly.

Jessie's non-appearance was thus accounted for, and he tried not to remember that on many similar occasions she had ingeniously excused herself for an instant, slipped out into the hall long enough to give him his welcome kiss, and then returned, with a demure countenance, to her unsuspecting guest. Mr. Harrison betook himself to the sitting-room, and beguiled the half-hour that yet remained before dinner-time by the evening paper, with one ear on the alert for sounds of the visitor's departure. To his surprise, the door leading into the parlor was presently thrown open, and Jessie announced, formally, "Dinner is ready, Roger," while behind her towered the tall, spare figure of Miss Jordan, a voluble spinster, whom he, in common with the rest of her acquaintances, professed to respect very sincerely, but for whose society he entertained no remarkable predilection. Too gentlemanly and hospitable to betray his wish that she had chosen to dine elsewhere on this particular evening, he advanced and paid his respects; then, as in duty bound, gave her his arm to the dining-room, Jessie following with Tilly. Roger had not known that the scene of the morning had left any unpleasant impression, any symptom of self-reproach upon his mind, until he was advised of the fact by his chagrin that Miss Jordan's presence prevented him from sealing a tacit peace upon his wife's lips. He would not have raked open the ashes of forgetfulness that already covered the lately hot coals of strife. To renew the subject might re-

awaken passion, but he did long to say, "Forgive me, little wife!" and meet her beaming look of love and trust in return. That was all, but this was denied him, just yet.

The meal was not a silent one. Miss Jordan bore the chief part in this, as in most conversations in which she participated. Roger replied animatedly, and with unfailing good-nature, while Jessie was neither grave nor taciturn. Nevertheless, her husband missed something. The "infernal" sulks were not in possession, for her manner was cheerful and her smiles frequent; but her eye met his precisely as it did Miss Jordan's; her tone was pleasantly polite, but his ear ached for the undercurrent of feeling he had loved to detect in her most commonplace address to him at other times, and once or twice, when he anxiously sought to attract her notice, he failed unaccountably. When they returned to the parlor, he made a bolder move. Miss Jordan never dissembled her contemptuous amusement at sight of what she called "sentimental foolery" between married people; but Roger was growing strangely covetous of some one of the many tokens of sympathy and affection he was used to have lavished upon him. Under pretext of setting a chair for his wife, he contrived to lay hold of her hand, and press it warmly.

"How have you been to-day, dear?"

The cool fingers slipped from his without answering his grasp. "About as usual, thank you!"

"My dear Mrs. Harrison! is it lawful to practise even an affectionate deceit?" exclaimed Miss Jordan. "She has been martyred all day, my dear sir, by one of her excruciating headaches. She is the greatest sufferer I know." And she ran on with a long dissertation upon neuralgic affections and the divers remedies prescribed for them, to all of which Jessie seemed to pay polite attention, and not two sentences of which were heard by Roger.

"How long has your head ached?" he seized the first opportunity of asking.

"I arose with it this morning. It is not worth mentioning."

"Not by you, perhaps," interrupted Miss Jordan. "I often say that it is marvellous to see how heroically you endure pain. I do not understand how you keep about as you do. For my part, when I have a turn of headache, there is nothing for it but to go to bed, and exclude every ray of light, and lie perfectly still, taking nux vomica every hour, and with a bottle of aromatic vinegar by me until the violence of the seizure has abated."

"My wife is a wonderful woman, Miss Jordan!" returned Roger.

He had not moved from Jessie's side, and now passed his hand caressingly over her glossy hair. Not twenty-four hours ago the words and action would have sent a rush of gladness to her heart, a flash of affectionate delight to her eyes. She remained impassive now as an insensate block of stone; her heart lay still, dull, and hard within her bosom.

"He thinks to cheat me into forgiveness by flattering and fond phrases," she thought. "He dreads a scene—the further exhibition of my sulky temper. He need not."

Roger grumbled secretly at the necessity that made him Miss Jordan's escort home; not at the long walk of eight or ten blocks, but at the increased delay of a private and what he was sure would be a satisfactory interview with his wife. There was a lover-like impatience in his quick tread on his return, in the joyous run up the front steps, the hasty opening of the door, and the eager expectancy of his look as he turned into the parlor. The gas was lowered, and the room quite still. Perhaps Jessie had lain down upon the sofa, as she was not well. She never retired until he came in. He raised the jet of flame very cautiously, not to dazzle her eyes. There

was no one in either front or back room, so he sat down and waited for five minutes. Then a footstep in the hall made his heart leap. It was Katy.

"Mrs. Harrison told me to ask you to excuse her for not sitting up for you, sir. Her head ached, and she has gone to bed."

"Very well, Katy."

"And I was to ask if you wished for anything, if you please, sir?"

"Nothing. You can go." He sighed heavily, extinguished the lights, locked the doors, and went up stairs on tip-toe. "Jessie, darling!" he said, softly, entering their chamber.

There was no sound except the regular breathing of the supposed sleeper. His heart ached emptily; he would have given much for a word, a look, a single kiss, but he forbore to disturb her. In the uneasy cogitations that kept him awake for more than two hours he tried to persuade himself that he had acted ridiculously in attaching so much importance to the somewhat unusual demeanor of a half sick woman. He ought to have more confidence in her good sense and affection than to suspect her of cherishing any spiteful or unkind feelings towards him, still less of acting a part to punish him for the thoughtless heat into which he had been betrayed by that rascally newspaper thief and laggard of a cook. She was the best little wife in Christendom, and she knew him too well to mind his few cross words; knew that his wrath was the most evanescent and harmless of squibs, and always atoned for by redoubled kindness after the trifling explosion was over. But he would introduce the subject early in the morning. Jessie could conceal nothing from him, and if he discovered that she had been so absurdly sensitive as to remember their altercation, he would declare his innocence of all intent to wound her, and set everything straight.

When he awoke on the morrow, it was bright day, and Jessie had disappeared. He consulted his watch, and found that it was just her usual hour of rising. What could have called her forth so early? He dressed in solitude, and more rapidly than he had done for many months. The vague oppression of last night was upon him still, and he longed to have it dissipated by a candid explanation and mutual understanding. When he descended to the parlor, the *Times* lay spread open conspicuously upon the centre-table, but there was no wife visible. The breakfast-bell tinkled punctually to the appointed minute, and Roger, obeying the call, beheld Jessie, in her neat breakfast-dress and cap, already seated at the table, supported on the right hand by Tilly, who seldom left her bed in season to take this meal with her parents. Her father did not exactly surmise that this was a ruse of the mother's to escape a *tête-à-tête* with himself, but he was sorry to see the child there. She was a bright little chatter-box, and an unsafe listener to confidential talks.

"You stole a march upon me," said he, cheerily.

"Good morning," answered Jessie, with a faint, civil smile. And she commenced setting out the cups and saucers.

Roger slipped into his chair. He had meant to kiss her, but now that he was face to face with her it was not the simple and easy thing he had thought it would be. He was intensely uncomfortable, felt disagreeably awkward — why, he could not have told for his life, only the personage at the head of the board was such a graven image of propriety that he dared not take liberties with her. Pshaw! the idea of a man's being awed by his own wife!

"How is the head?" he said, sharpening the carver on the steal very briskly and needlessly, preparatory to cutting the juicy, flavorful steak, which was his favorite breakfast dish. Jessie always ordered "porter-house," and cooked it as no one else could — so thought her husband.

"It does not ache at all, thank you! Shall I give you tea, or coffee, this morning?"

"Coffee, if you please. I am glad that you are feeling better."

"Is there any news from the seat of war?" inquired Jessie, in the same ladylike but distant manner.

Roger replied by reading several items, which furnished food for talk until they arose from the table. Mr. Harrison had no room to complain of the meal, which was excellently cooked and served, or of the conversational part of the entertainment; yet he owned, in inward discontent, that he would have been more at his ease had breakfast been late and uneatable, and his wife sullen. Then he could have spoken out strongly and to the point; now, he had no excuse for unburdening his mind.

He tarried in the front hall, after donning his hat and overcoat, until Jessie appeared, holding Tilly in her arms. The child had struck her head against a corner of the kitchen table, and the mother was comforting her with tender words and kisses upon the wounded part, the weeping infant clinging to her neck the while. This display of maternal feeling, so like Jessie's old, natural self, emboldened Roger, while it excited a momentary jealousy.

"Don't give her all, mamma," he said, meeting them. "I have not had a kiss since the day before yesterday."

She had believed that he was on his way down town, until he spoke, and the instant alteration of face, voice, and deportment went like an ice-bolt to his heart. She put Tilly down, gave her husband her hand, and offered her mouth for his hearty kiss, with a sort of cold ceremony that made the salute a miserable farce. He tried to catch her eye; but if she observed his glance of reproachful tenderness, she paid it no heed.

"Tilly," she said, formally, "kiss your papa good-by."

The child was petted and consoled with, the father promising to bring her a package of candies as medicine for the bruise.

"And what may I have the pleasure of getting for mamma?" he added, pleadingly.

"You are very kind, but I will not trouble you to-day."

They parted — he to bear all through the day the pained consciousness of grieved and despised affection; she to stifle the strivings of better and softer emotions in her chilled heart, and devise new schemes for serving duty and murdering love.

That evening Roger brought home a book of magnificent photographs, large and splendidly executed sun copies of celebrated pictures. He had heard Jessie speak of having seen a few specimens of these in a print-shop, some days before, and her enthusiastic description had tempted him to make the purchase. He would try hard to rekindle one spark of her native fire in countenance or speech. He adored, while he sometimes lost patience with the impetuous, warm-hearted wife, who loved him well and served him faithfully, in spite of a foible or two that proved her womanhood. He would not have exchanged her for Venus or Minerva; still less did he relish the transmogrification into the polished, passionless dame who had presided over his household last night and this morning.

Jessie was in the parlor, dressed handsomely in a robe he had selected and presented to her, not long since; her hair was becomingly arranged; the room was orderly and bright, as he liked to see it; his arm-chair set forward, with dressing-gown and slippers awaiting his use. The most loving spouse could not have consulted his taste with more success. One glance took in all this; then, his whole attention was given to her who had contrived these accessories to his comfort. She received him — that is the word for the act, for there was no show of meeting him half way; no full-hearted greeting; she received

him, then, standing by the seat from which she had risen at his entrance, with about as much *empressement* of welcome as she would have showed to the acquaintance of a week, whom she felt constrained to treat politely. True, she allowed him to kiss her; to stand with his arm about her, as he presented the volume and looked at a few of the finest plates with her. She thanked him, moreover, in graceful terms, for his kindness in recollecting her expressed admiration for the book, and the pains he had taken to procure it, but there was no warmth or vivacity in voice or behavior. Words, intonations, gestures, were self-possessed, measured, and he muttered to himself, on his way to the dressing-room, "Infernally and insufferably freezing!"

He *was* too prone to the use of strong expressions, but he had a strong, warm heart, and the utter failure of his peace-offering to alter his wife's bearing, cut him to the quick. He was a clumsy manœuvrer, and this little device exhausted his tactics in that direction. He would not stand it! he vowed over the wash-stand, splashing the water furiously over his face and rubbing his hands very hard with the crash towel — no! not an hour longer! He would break the ice at a blow; if gentler measures failed, "get up a row, a grand blow-out; a regular nor'wester! anything but this Arctic calm! This being kept at arms' length by a woman with whom one has lived for almost seven years, is a game that won't work!"

He paid his nightly visit to the nursery, took little Roger from the crib and strained him to his heart so tightly that a sigh, very like a sob, escaped from his manly chest; then laid him down with a final kiss, and quickly, as if he feared his courage would forsake him, descended to the parlor. Jessie was still engrossed by the photographs.

"This is a fine copy of Ary Schœffer's *Christus Consolator*," she said, in her even accents.

Instead of replying, Roger laid a heavy hand on her shoulder. Her eyes turned, in surprise, to the agitated face above her.

"Jessie! why do you persist in treating me in this cruelly unkind manner? You know I love you; that I live but in your smile; that this sort of thing is killing me! What have I said or done to merit it at your hands?"

A flush she could not prevent swept over her forehead, but not a feature changed.

"I was not aware that I was cruel or unkind. If I have offended you in any manner, I beg your pardon. The fault was not intentional."

"Do you pretend to say that you do not know how different your behavior to me since yesterday morning, has been from your uniform demeanor during the whole six or seven years of our married life?"

Unwittingly, he had hit upon the touchword most likely to steel her against all overtures of peace.

"I can only repeat what I said just now," she rejoined, yet more coolly. "I have not designed to offend you. If I have failed in my endeavors to please you, I ask your forgiveness, and will do what I can to expiate for my wrong doing."

"And this is your answer? the one by which I am to abide?"

Roger's lips were white and rigid, and his voice shook in putting the query.

"I have no other to make. If it does not please you, I may regret it, but cannot amend it."

"And you are content that we should live on for a year — for ten — twenty years — until death part us — as we have done for the last forty-eight hours? I am to understand that this is your deliberate choice?"

There was a dreary composure, a mournful resignation in Jessie's eyes and tone, as of one who gazes down a weary,

darksome vista, stretching away indefinitely into the gloom of an unknown to-come.

"I do not see that it can ever be otherwise."

"Be it so, then!"

Roger wheeled away and walked the floor, gnawing his lower lip in pain or anger.

"Dinner is ready. Will you go into the dining-room?" said Jessie, rising.

"Wait one moment!" He came up close to her, and took her hands. "I charge you to remember, if our future life is as wretched as our past has been happy, that it is all your work. I wash my hands of all complicity in the sin — for guilt it is, whether you believe it or not. I suppose that your ever-too-ready sensitiveness has taken offence at a few hasty words which I uttered yesterday morning, under circumstances of great provocation. I do not recollect my exact language on that occasion, but whatever it was, *I retract nothing*, since I have seen the unholy and unfeminine spirit of retaliation you have exhibited. I have made my last appeal to your affection and sense of right. Hereafter, I accept your judgment of your husband as the correct one, and " — with a sardonic smile — "I shall try to prove to you and to myself the truth of your conclusions."

For a moment Jessie trembled at the demon of wrath she had aroused; for one instant her heart awoke from its lethargy and gave a wild spring to arrest the decree that doomed it to perpetual isolation; for one second her deathly pallor and shaking frame touched her judge with pity. Then she mastered forebodings and womanly weakness.

"Very well! And, since we now understand each other, I think you will agree with me in thinking that the recurrence of these scenes can do no good and may do much harm to the children, besides exciting the observation of the servants and

other lookers-on. My desire is to live peaceably, and my aim shall still be to avoid strife and to do my duty to you in all respects. If I cannot make you happy — and this I have ceased to expect — there is the more reason why, since we must continue to live together, I should redouble my efforts to promote your outward comfort.”

“You need not continue to live with me unless you choose.” Roger was no match for his wife in stolid composure. “I put no force upon your inclinations.”

“I must remain, unless you forbid it,” rejoined Jessie, steadily. “We both owe a duty to our children which we cannot shirk.” Pausing for a moment, and getting no answer, she added: “Shall we go in to dinner, now?”

“I want none!” he said, angrily. “You would take as little comfort in my society as I should in yours, as matters now stand. Since there is no peace to be had within doors, I will seek it elsewhere. This is one of the first fruits of your beautiful new system.” He quitted the room, and, an instant later, she heard the clang of the front door.

If the evil part of his nature were rampant, hers had not remained quiescent. A red spot burned on either cheek, her eyes were full of scornful fire.

“And this is a MAN!” she said, between her set teeth. “A great, glorious, lord of creation! ‘in understanding how infinite! in comprehension how like a god!’ Truly there is but a step from the sublime to the ridiculous, for the veriest child might be ashamed of such a display of unreasoning passion. The struggle has come! it is over, and I have not forgotten *my* self-respect. My task is the easier for it, for I did respect *him* a little before!”

“Mamma!” cried Tilly, running in, “Ann says dinner is all spoiling.”

With such contempt for the child’s father in her heart, she

could smooth her face with a smile, and stoop to kiss the rosy mouth.

"We will eat it together, dear. Papa will not be home until late."

Pride and temper kept her up well for the next hour or two. But, when Tilly had gone to bed, and the orders for breakfast were issued, she seated herself with her sewing under the drop-light, and the household settled into a stillness that was absolutely appalling to her strained nerves and excited fancy. She could not divest herself of the impression that there had been a death under her roof. The sight of Roger's empty chair, the useless parade of gown and slippers, were simply insupportable; so, she arose and wheeled the one back out of the range of vision and laid the other aside in the library.

"Now, I shall be more comfortable!" she murmured, resuming her chair and needle. "There is no show of expectation which I do not feel. If he prefers passing his evenings abroad, I shall not pine in my loneliness. Since we are to walk in divided paths, we had best begin at once."

Yet the society of her own reflections was less tolerable than she had anticipated. A great chasm had suddenly yawned, deep and dark, in her life. A few hours had reversed the aspect of the whole world to her; had transformed her husband and herself, and it was not the work of a day to become used to the revolution. Do what she would, she was vexed to find her thoughts obstinately straying back into the forbidden paths of the olden time — and shuddering, as the will urged her forward, to contemplate what lay before her. She strove to ponder upon her children's destinies; to forget the wife in the mother; to hope for the period when their grateful devotion should compensate to her for the ruthless destruction of her dream of wedded bliss. Other wives had undergone a similar disenchantment and grown stronger, wiser, better, under the

ordeal; had achieved great things for their families, their sex, and their kind. Most of the gifted women of the earth had been unfortunate in their married lives; had resisted the attempts of their legal masters to hold them, body and soul, in abject servitude; for men were the same in every age and land, and the spirit that would not crouch in fawning submission to their caprices of temper and will, must be broken.

Alas, poor little Jessie! heroic martyr as she imagined herself to be, was not a gifted woman! She had no resources of art, or science, or literature in which she could forget her woes; no fervor of inspiration strong enough to lift her out of herself and everyday life. She was formed for the home-circle. Her very accomplishments were of such kind and extent as enlivened a domestic party, but which would never gain for her *éclat* abroad. She had not minded passing an evening alone, now and then, when some imperative engagement called Roger away from her. The time used to slip by easily and happily with her needle work, or a new book, or her music. She did not know how much the flight of the hours was assisted by the thought of the loved one's return; the knowledge that, wherever he was, and however he might be occupied, he remembered her and desired to be at her side. She might resolve to face the prospect of spending every evening as she was doing this, but there was no use in disguising the fact that she was horribly *ennuyée* by eight o'clock. Even Miss Jordan would have been a relief. The void left in the heart that has once loved, by the removal of its idol, is rarely a silent desolation. It is oftener filled with vain cryings after the forever lost, perhaps oftenest with yearnings for some new support for the bleeding tendrils torn from their first clinging-place. Many a story of shame and sorrow has had its key in this natural law.

CHAPTER III.

“HEIGH-HO !”

The audible yawn was checked midway by a ring at the door. Jessie brightened up ; peeped into the mirror to assure herself that there were no tell-tale lines in her brow or about her mouth, and that her toilette was in good order, and turned to greet her visitor. It was Willie Dunbar, a frequent and always a welcome guest, he having been Roger's groomsman and best friend, and an early beau, a boy-lover of Jessie's. He was a fine looking young fellow of thirty, or thereabouts, intelligent and gentlemanly, and, rumor said, a confirmed bachelor. Jessie had the reputation of having, by her rejection of his youthful suit, doomed him to celibacy, an accusation which she laughed to scorn. Of course, she could not deny that Willie had loved her, and that he had confessed his attachment, but that was ages ago, and he had forgotten all about it, or only remembered it as a silly fancy. At all events, it was certain that he had sincerely forgiven her, while he remained her fast friend and admirer.

“Alone ?” he said, interrogatively, as they shook hands. “Where is Roger ?”

“That is more than I can tell !” she rejoined, with well-counterfeited gayety. “But he will be back shortly. Take a seat ; I am obliged to you for coming in and putting my blues to flight.”

“Blues !” with an involuntary, searching look ; “that is a novel malady for you. What has produced it ?”

Jessie was provoked to feel herself reddening at the simple query.

"Did you think that you enjoyed a monopoly of the article, 'low spirits,'" she parried his question. "Wait until you have the neuralgia all night and all day, and Miss Jordan to stay all the afternoon and evening with you, condoling and prescribing, and then see if you do not suffer from nervous reaction for a week afterwards."

Willie laughed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"What a combination of miseries! I am content to believe what you say of the effect of the visitation, without experimenting for myself. Ah!"—catching sight of the volume of photographs—"there is something new and handsome!"

Once, Jessie would have delighted in talking of her husband's kind generosity; but she made no mention of the donor, while they examined the pictures and discussed their merits. She was very glad Willie had come in. It was a pleasant interruption to the sombre monotony of the evening. He was charming company, and liked her, she knew, as well as he did his sisters. She had never seen him to more advantage than as he appeared in this interview. She had been so misunderstood and underrated, and insulted, of late, that it was like healing salve to her wounded self-love to note his respectful attention to what she said, and hear the occasional sentence of kindly appreciation or regard that dropped from him in the course of their chat. She was only a woman, and mere women are weak enough to crave and to value such tokens of affectionate interest in themselves and their petty affairs. By and by Willie asked her to go to the piano. He had always admired her voice and her execution, and she esteemed it a positive pleasure to oblige him. He played passably on the flute—not so well as did Roger, but she brought out her husband's fine, silver-keyed instrument, which no one ever

handled besides himself, since he bought it — and insisted upon Willie's accompanying her. There was a wicked gratification in thus casting down under foot all the sentimental associations she had, hitherto, delighted to keep sacred. She was amazed that she remained unmoved by the familiar songs she had practised so often with Roger, whose passionate fondness for music had been her incentive in improving herself in vocalization and the use of the piano-forte. She was growing callous — she congratulated herself, and under the stimulus of this unworthy triumph, she played more brilliantly, talked gayly, and sang, as Willie told her with truth — “exquisitely.”

“I wish you would bring your flute, the next time you come, and let that be soon,” she said, engagingly. “You enjoy this sort of thing so much, and Mrs. Dunbar is not musical, I believe?”

“Unfortunately no!” he said, reflecting her saucy smile. “But there is this much to be said in recommendation of that mythical personage — if her quiet habits are a disappointment to me, in this matter, she is a pearl as regards others. For example, curtain-lectures and matrimonial squabbles are things unknown in our model abode.”

Again Jessie blushed, and this time Mr. Dunbar could not help noticing it. Fearing that he had inadvertently touched a raw spot, he hastened to change the topic.

“There is that pretty little ballad — “Rock me to sleep, Mother!” he said. “Shall we try it?”

It was a great favorite with Roger. How many times, when he was tired, or suffering with headache, had she held his head upon her lap, and, while stroking his dark curls, warbled the tender strain until he fell asleep! It would have required an effort of will to go through it successfully, had she been fresh and unshaken by previous trials of nerve and feeling — but her factitious strength was gradually deserting her.

That is the worst with novices in acting — they are liable to break down at the most unlucky moment. She finished the first verse with tolerable steadiness of voice and finger — Willie's stronger tones helping her out upon the chorus. Then she began the second, alone —

“Over my heart, in the days that are flown,
No love like mother-love ever has shown;
No other worship abides and endures,
Faithful, unselfish, and patient like yours.
None like a mother can charm away pain
From the sick soul and world-weary brain.”

Here the tremulous notes, plaintive as the cry of a mateless bird — ceased; down went Jessie's head into her clasped hands, and a rain of tears trickled through her fingers, upon the ivory keys.

“I cannot! oh, I cannot sing it!”

“My dear Mrs. Harrison! Jessie!” exclaimed Mr. Dunbar, regretfully, “I ought not to have put your feelings to this test! I should have remembered —”

Jessie raised her face, quickly, dashing off the rain from her eyelashes.” “What do you mean?” she asked, haughtily, “Remembered what?”

“Only” — his manner indicative of intense astonishment at the inexplicable change in hers — “that to one who has lost a dear and loving mother, those lines must bring sadness. I should have recollected what a parent and woman yours was, and how you must mourn her still.”

“Thank you!” she said, gratefully, ashamed that she had so nearly betrayed her secret; the loneliness of the loveless wife; the longing of her spirit, in its present poverty of affection and companionship, for the tender comfortings, the unswerving, inalienable devotion of her who was no more. “Never let her feel the want of my love!” the dying mother had said to

Roger, and he had promised to be to the weeping daughter both husband and parent. How had the vow been kept?

Jessie rallied speedily ; laughed at her own weakness ; sang and talked with apparent ease and liveliness, but those mournful lines were never out of her mind. A wailing voice seemed to sing them, over and over, in her ear —

“ No other worship abides and endures,
Faithful, unselfish, and patient like yours ! ”

The wildest, most passionate worship she had ever inspired had changed into impatient contempt — maybe aversion. Not thus would the fond mother have cast off her child, had her soul been dyed with the blackest crimes. Oh ! that she could indeed “ turn Time backward in his flight,” be a child, free, happy, hopeful, once more !

Mr. Dunbar had observed much, this evening, and deduced certain conclusions therefrom. There was a screw loose in the home that, more than any other, had excited his desire to have a wife and fireside of his own. Jessie was making a brave struggle to keep up appearances, to hide her hurt — and he honored her for the attempt, but the dear little woman was a poor hypocrite, and the mask was painfully thin to one who knew her as he did. Harrison deserved a caning, if he had given her cause for sorrow ; for Willie’s love for his girl-sweetheart had left its trace in a certain chivalrous attachment for his friend’s spouse.

A rattling at the outer door made both check their conversation, and listen.

“ Some one is tampering with the lock ! ” whispered Jessie, in considerable trepidation ; “ is trying to open the door with a false key ! ”

“ Not at this hour of the evening ! ” smiled Willie, encouragingly. “ It is more likely to be some tipsy fellow who has

mistaken the house for his own; I will go and send him about his business."

Jessie followed him as far as the parlor-door, peeping timidly into the hall, while he drew back the night-latch, and admitted — the master of the house!

"Harrison! why, we mistook you for a burglar or a toper!"

"Ha! ha! ha! a capital joke! Something wrong with this confounded key! wouldn't go in! How do you do, old boy?" shaking his hand violently. "Glad to see you! walk in!"

Jessie had shrunk back, with a cold agony at her heart she had never felt before. The horrid truth flashed upon her at the first thick, stuttered word uttered by her husband. He was intoxicated! he, the upright, honorable gentleman — high in the world's esteem; whose character, among his fellow-citizens, had never been perilled by an unworthy deed; whose reputation was stainless as that of the purest woman! Sweeping as had been her reprobation of his recent behavior to herself, the possibility of his actual moral delinquency had never entered her wildest imaginings. The mere idea would have overwhelmed her with dismay; and, here, without a word of warning, she was obliged to confront the loathsome reality!

Willie Dunbar shared in her consternation. He could scarcely credit the evidence of his own senses, testifying, as they all did, to his friend's real condition.

"No, thank you!" he said, hoarsely, to the invitation extended him. "I was just going. It is getting late!"

"Humbug! Now I can tell you, Will, this is a thing I won't allow! You come and make love to my wife all the evening, and then try to sneak off, the minute I show my face! I'll be hanged if you shan't take a glass of wine with me before you budge!"

He seemed from the sound to be dragging his guest towards

the parlor, and overcome by shame and fright, unable to meet Willie's compassionate regards, or to support Roger's drunken salutation, Jessie ran through the library, and, so on, up to her chamber, where she dashed herself upon the bed, in a paroxysm of terror and woe. Presently she raised her head, and hearkened. The gentlemen were still talking below, and she crept, by degrees, to the head of the staircase, to gather the purport of their conversation. Willie spoke in firm, but mild accents, apparently trying to quiet the other by persuasion and exposition. She caught a single phrase.

"Your angel of a wife —"

Roger broke in coarsely, with a laugh. "That is as much as you confounded lucky fellows of bachelors know about the estate of double misery. She is an angel — over the left!"

"Roger! I am ashamed of you!"

The rest of the sentence, which was long, was inaudible. At the end of fifteen or twenty minutes — a space of time that seemed interminable to the quaking listener, they came out into the hall.

"You must!" Willie said, decidedly. "Your clothes are soaked with rain, and you have kept them on too long, already."

"You see (hic!) I went out without an umbrella, and didn't (hic!) notice the storm until I was drenched."

"Go quietly up to bed, and, I say, Harrison — be a man — and, for the love of mercy — for the sake of decency — don't terrify your poor wife!"

"All right! Good-night!" Roger had gone up a couple of steps, when, with that inevitable mingling of the comic with the deplorable and disgusting, that disposes the most pitying spectator to laugh at a drunkard's behavior, he halted, and laid his hand patronizingly upon his adviser's head. "William Dunbar! you are a fine fellow! a deuced fine fellow! but, let

me say it as a well-wisher to you (hic!), one who has a sincere regard for your reputation (hic!), you are just a *little* too fond of (hic!) crooking your elbow! Go straight home, my man, and look not upon the wine while (hic!) it is red! That's Scripture, my boy, and blamed sound advice; don't neglect it."

Jessie had not stayed to hear this through, but hastening back to her chamber, had locked the door of the inner room, the nursery, where the children lay, wrapped in their innocent slumbers, and now stood, nerving herself — for what? She dared not trust herself to picture the probable scene in reserve for her. She had never spoken to a drunken man; never been in the same room with one in her life; and her ideas of their brutal violence, their total irresponsibility to conscience or pity, were drawn from highly-wrought fiction, and such items in the police reports of the daily papers as had chanced to fall under her notice, narrating instances of horrible atrocity, unnatural cruelty, perpetrated by tipsy fathers and husbands. But, if her life were to be the penalty of her steadfastness she must stand her ground. This degraded driveller was her husband, and no eyes save hers must behold him at his lowest estate.

She had an impression, derived whence she knew not, that he ought to be gotten into bed without delay, and that she would be compelled, by reason of his helplessness, to assist him in his preparations for that needful retreat. So, when he staggered into the room, and, after a ludicrously desperate affectation of standing very erect, and walking in a very straight course across the carpet to the bureau, where he was accustomed to stand while winding up his watch — he sank into a chair, not appearing to see her — she did not lose a moment, but going resolutely up to him, took hold of his coat to remove it. It was saturated with wet, as was each article

of his under-clothing, actually clinging to the skin, as she helped him pull them off. Neither spoke a syllable, while she produced dry garments ; put them upon him, and chafed his feet with flannel, to restore circulation and warmth. She was dumb with disgust and horror, and he, either stupefied by the increasingly deadly effect of his potations, or morose and mortified at having to accept such offices at her hands. She asked a question, when he was lain down.

“ Can I do anything more for you ? ”

He shivered, gave a grunt, that sounded like a negative ; pulled the blankets about his neck, and in less than a minute was fast asleep.

With clenched hands, knit brows, and bosom heaving with emotions too mighty for speech, Jessie stood like one in a fearful nightmare. Was she indeed awake, and had this awful curse descended upon the lately happy and peaceful family ? Had she become that wretched and pitiable thing — a drunkard’s wife ? Were her pure snow-drops of children to be polluted by a drunkard’s kisses ? to be reviled and pointed at, as the offspring of an inebriate ? Was that gross lump of humanity lying before her there, with inflamed features and muddled brain, and reeking, poisonous breath, to be henceforth the body of death, from which she was never to be delivered while life lasted ?

“ Heaven help me ! for this is very hard to bear ! ”

She carefully secured the doors, removing the keys, in a vague fear lest he should arise and attempt to wander abroad during the night ; then, extinguishing the light, locked herself in with the babies, in the nursery ; exchanged her evening dress for a wrapper, and lay down beside Tilly on her little bed. Watching, thinking, fearing, she passed the hours until the drizzling morning broke through the shutters. It was strange that, with the memory of her husband’s parting words

before dinner, fresh in her remembrance, it did not occur to her to blame herself for this frightful wreck of happiness and respectability. Roger had obeyed the impulse of his unbridled passions. Her conduct, throughout the whole affair, had been dignified — dutiful — in a word, irreproachable. He had first flung her from him ; declared, in unequivocal terms, that her companionship was distasteful to him ; had avowed his diminished attachment to her and home. From this, the declension into open, scandalous vice was easy and rapid. She would have scouted the insinuation that she had robbed him of the safeguards men of his temperament find in the sweet love and confidence of their domestic circles, and driven him beyond the pale of her influence. Her mental reproaches were for him — him only. If she had not ceased to love him before this latter flagrant act, every instinct of purity, every principle of right must now be in revolt. Yet duty must, and should still assert its supremacy ; still control her actions and speech. There was no playing martyr now ! The rack was set boldly in her sight ; the cords and screws all ready.

At one thought she winced sorely. Another was privy to this horrible humiliation. Total secrecy was thus rendered impossible. At a word from Willie Dunbar, every finger in the community would be pointed at the family and their fallen head. Nevertheless, she was thankful that, since the shameful story was in another's keeping, that Willie held it. She could rely upon his discretion — his friendship for Roger — above all, upon his sympathizing regard for herself. Her hands were more closely clasped as she recalled the sorrowful respect of the tone that had called her an "angel," then, her cheeks crimsoned hotly at the thought of the indelicate, unfeeling sneer that had answered him.

"If I had married Willie, I would never have suffered as I am doing now ! His wife would have been tenderly cherished

—respected and beloved! Oh! why did I not see all this eight years ago?”

It was the first open utterance of disloyalty to her wedded husband, and there could have been no more positive proof of the distance her wayward feet had strayed from the right path, the swift and dangerous perversion of her convictions of right and wrong; of the solemn duty she had sworn to him before God and man, than the fact that she was not startled by the thought; did not repel the subtle whisper as a direct and fatal temptation from him who has woven many nets of similar texture for unwary and reckless souls.

CHAPTER IV.

ROGER HARRISON awoke late on the morning succeeding his night of dissipation. It was some time before he could collect his wits sufficiently to understand the meaning of his furred tongue, dry throat, and aching head. It was not until he started to a sitting posture, and his eye fell upon the empty chair where he invariably deposited his clothes upon retiring, that he recollected, dimly, his inability to undress himself; his wife's grave, shocked face; Dunbar's remonstrances, and the excesses that had reduced him to this state. His brain felt like a great ball of molten lead, rolling, and swinging, and beating, with the sound of fifty sledge-hammers, within his skull, and every bone ached as if it were broken. He lay back upon his pillow, with a deep groan, just as the door unclosed noiselessly to admit Jessie.

She bore upon her arm the garments he had worn over night, now dried and brushed by her own hands. She would not put this clue to their master's fall within the servants' reach. It is an old adage, that he is a fool, indeed, who cannot carry an umbrella when it rains, and that Mr. Harrison had failed to use this very common precaution, certainly argued a remarkably befuddled brain. Arranging her burden upon the vacant chair, Jessie glanced at the bed and met the blood-shot eyes of its occupant. She could not repress a start and a shiver, which were not lost upon him. No wonder that she dreaded and desired to avoid him!

Not offering to approach him, she inquired in a brief, busi-

ness-like way — “Are you ready for your breakfast? If so, I will have it brought up to you, before you rise.”

She understood, then, the torments of body he was undergoing; his powerlessness to get up or walk!

“You are very good!” he responded, meekly. “I will trouble you for a cup of coffee; I cannot eat.”

She withdrew to give the order, reappearing, shortly, with a basin and towels, for his ablutions, and a goblet of ice-water in her hand. She had heard of the burning thirst that consumed the debauchee, and he knew why this was brought; was abased in his sight and in hers, even while he drained greedily the last drop of the delicious draught. Gently, he imagined it was tenderly, his wife laved the hot hands and face; brushed his hair; beat up and adjusted his pillow.

“You had better lie still and try to sleep now,” she said, when he had quaffed his coffee. “I will darken the room, and keep the house quiet.”

“Jessie!” He detained her as she would have moved away.

“What is it?” Her tone was patient, but formal.

“I have lowered myself in your esteem. I deserve your scorn, but you cannot despise me, as I do myself. I never meant to drink to excess. I did not do it to drown care; but I had walked far in the rain, too miserable to care or think about the storm, and growing faint, I went into a restaurant and ordered my supper. Then, I called for brandy, for I was thoroughly chilled and very uncomfortable. When it came, I mixed a glass with hot water, thinking that I would sip it while I ate. I was absent-minded and careless as to what I did, and when this was gone, I prepared a second. The effect was pleasant, warming and invigorating me, and I had no suspicion that I was exceeding the bounds of prudence. The room became hot and close, after a while, but my brain was not affected

until I passed again into the outer air. I met no one that I knew, for the night was stormy. I came directly home, for I was growing giddy, and I guessed what was the matter. You know the rest. This is the plain truth. My conduct was inexcusable. I own it freely, without an attempt at palliation. But I here swear solemnly, that this, my earliest transgression of this nature, shall be the last. The memory of what I now endure, and the suffering I have cost you, shall be my defence for the future. Sweet wife! ministering angel! say you forgive me! that our home shall be once again the paradise it was of old — before these miserable misunderstandings and my grievous downfall made shipwreck of our happiness!”

What malevolent genius stood at Jessie's side as this touching appeal was made? this humble confession and petition, in which was not a word of censure of her? She did not ask herself. She only knew that it was the struggle of an instant to curb her rising pity, to harden her features into the marble mask she had worn sedulously in his presence since their rupture, two days before; that a thrill of exultation, she did not recognize as gratified revenge, shot through her soul. He had done his utmost to humble her; had trampled relentlessly upon her feelings. It was but fitting retribution that he should lie in the dust before her — self-convicted, and implore her not to thrust him away. He had accused her of bringing misery upon him. His doing had resulted in infamy to himself and the guiltless beings dependent upon him.

“You are the best judge — the undisputed master of your own actions!” she answered in pseudo-humility. “I do not presume to condemn any of them.”

She never forgot his mournful look.

“Is it so, Jessie? Can nothing move you? no extremity of penitence win your forgiveness? no promise regain your confidence? Have you, then, entirely ceased to love me?”

"If you please, Roger, we will not talk of that. My feelings may be beyond the control of my will; I trust that my deeds will always testify my constant sense of what is due to you as my husband."

With a weary sigh he relinquished the hand to which he had clung while he had pleaded and questioned, and laid his cheek o the pillow.

"What can I do to make you more comfortable?" she inquired, secretly half-frightened at her own stoical reception of his advances.

"Nothing — thank you!"

"Will you sleep, now?"

"I will try!" with the same subdued air. "You have been very kind to me. I hope not to trouble you further; I have been a great tax upon your time and strength. I am sorry!"

Jessie was unprepared for this child-like resignation to her majestic decree. If he had stormed or grumbled, her armor lay ready to her hand. As it was, she was puzzled, and, to tell the truth, a little shaken. She peeped into the darkened room, several times in the course of the forenoon, but, seeing that he slept soundly, did not disturb him. At the hour for luncheon, she ventured to speak to him and offer a cup of tea, but he was only partially aroused; declined the proffered refreshment, and dozed off again. By evening, he began to toss to and fro, and mutter strangely, and she was terrified to perceive, after repeated efforts to attract his notice and obtain a coherent reply, that he was delirious. The heat of his limbs and head was almost scorching to the touch, and his breathing labored. Thoroughly alarmed, she sent off for the family physician, to whom she mentioned, guardedly, the wetting Mr. Harrison had sustained, adding that he took no precaution for warding off the evil effects of the same, beyond drinking a glass of brandy. This, she thought, had done him more harm than

good, since he was so unused to such fiery draughts, that it had produced a violent headache. She was very tender of the unconscious sufferer's reputation, and experienced a sad pleasure in shielding him from the suspicions of others. Anger was past, and pride, the demon fatal to her peace, and, possibly, her husband's life, was already quailing before the uplifted lash of remorse.

The doctor listened attentively to her story, recited below stairs ; but his aspect underwent a rapid change when he stood by the sick man's bed. His lifted eyebrows and compressed lips, as he laid his finger upon the bounding pulse, made Jessie tremble. Yet she was not prepared for his verdict. He was habitually terse and candid — some said, to a fault.

"Your husband is a very sick man, Mrs. Harrison. His symptoms indicate a severe attack of pneumonia, attended by a highly irritated state of the brain. Prompt remedies and good nursing are requisite. Late as it is, you had better allow me to look for an efficient nurse, to-night. There is no time to be wasted."

White as the wall against which she leaned for support, Jessie was yet able to reply firmly.

"I will nurse him myself, doctor ! Please leave your directions with me."

He looked doubtful. "The fatigue will be great, and you are not strong."

"I will not intrust my husband to the care of any one beside myself. I shall not lack for strength."

"A good wife !" thought the physician, as he re-entered his carriage. "A faithful, affectionate wife — and likely soon to be a widow."

Jessie was saying these last words to herself, hanging over Roger's bed, stricken by such remorseful despair as few are doomed to know in this world. He would die, and she had

murdered him ! as surely and guiltily taken his precious life, as if she had mixed his daily food with poison. Had she been mad — possessed of devils — God-forsaken ! that she had suffered an idle, petulant saying to outweigh the host of kindly deeds and tender words, whose name was legion, which had been given her as abundantly as the air she breathed, since the day when he took her to his large, loving heart and called her “ wife ! ” She forgot nothing of all this, now. Still less could she put from her the image of the seeking, anxious eyes that followed hers, the evening of Miss Jordan’s visit ; his efforts at conciliation, the next morning, and the bitter disappointment depicted in every feature at her haughty repulse ; the beseeching expression — half-hope, half-apprehension — that accompanied the presentation of the book he had bought to give her pleasure. Baffled and stung by her unwomanly and unwifely conduct, he had rushed from the chilling atmosphere of her presence, into the storm and to the maddening glass, and these had wrought his death. Nay, more — after he was struck down — when the mortal disease was already rioting in his veins, he had humbled himself to sue for her pardon ; had entreated her repeatedly, in spite of bodily pain and mental suffering, in the name of the love she once bore him, to put away her malice and uncharitableness, and grant him some token of kindness — and she had proved obdurate throughout ! Here was the beginning of her punishment ; — to see him bereft of consciousness ; seeing, hearing, knowing nothing — deaf to the voice of her weeping ; beyond the reach of her lamentations over the awful wrong she had done him ; her frantic prayers for pardon !

All night long she watched and served him. There was no condescension, now, in performing the humblest duties required by his situation. The hot, swollen hands were bathed with tears as well as fragrant cooling waters, and kisses were rained

upon the thick matted locks she had often to comb back from the flushed, uneasy brow. He did not recognize her voice during that long and agonizing vigil. A wild stare or a senseless mutter, was all the reply to the endearments lavished upon him — the caresses and protestations, to obtain one of which, he might have knelt vainly but yesterday morning.

The doctor paid an early call, and went away, leaving no encouragement to hope. At noon, he came again, and a third time that evening. He lingered longer at this than in the previous visits; examined his patient carefully, and sat, lost in grave study, his fingers upon the throbbing wrist, his regards fastened upon the face, stained darkly with fever. Jessie eyed him narrowly; her life seeming to hang upon his decision. She believed that she had braced herself to hear the worst, yet his address smote her like the clashing boom of a death-knell.

“I would like, with your permission, Mrs. Harrison, to hold a consultation upon this case. Have you any choice as to what physician I shall call in?”

“I leave that to you!” The response was just articulate.

“Mr. Dunbar is below!” continued the doctor. “He will remain until he learns from me how Mr. Harrison is, to-night. I will take the liberty of sending him for Dr. Elder. He stands high in his profession. Have I your consent to this?”

She bowed, and he left her.

Jessie sank upon her knees by the bedside and tried to pray, with a blind sense of the inutility of all human help to succor her darling from the dark valley she believed him to be entering. The All-pitiful doubtless heard her wordless groans; interpreted the language of the sighs that rent her heart; but to herself, the act she would have made devotion, appeared useless mummery; her petitions to rise no higher than her head, and there disperse in empty air. Instead of winning the

assurance of answered prayer, there was stamped, in letters of fire, wherever she looked, one sentence —

“For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again!”

As she had forgiven, was her great sin to be pardoned. Implacable and revengeful, her petitions were an abomination in the sight of the Lord.

The entrance of the physicians was the signal for her banishment; but she waited at the threshold while their conference lasted. They were startled and slightly embarrassed at the apparition that met them as they opened the door. She did not speak; only clasped her hands, with an appealing, beseeching look that melted both, used as they were to the sight of human woe.

“Take heart, my dear!” said old Dr. Elder, huskily, patting the fair young head, as if she were his daughter. “We will save him, if we can!”

His more frank coadjutor merely said, “We have concluded to vary the treatment, somewhat, Mrs. Harrison. I will write out the directions in here,” turning into an adjoining apartment.

When he gave her the paper and his verbal instructions, he remarked — “Mr. Dunbar wishes to speak with you. Can he come up?”

“No! no!” cried Jessie, shrinking back. “I cannot see him!”

The doctor looked his surprise. “You will allow him to remain in the house all night, as he requests — will you not? I must recommend this plan to you as highly desirable.”

“As you like — but I will not see him!”

She repeated — “I will not see him!” when she was again alone with Roger. Had she not wickedly compared this man with her husband? shamelessly dwelt upon the thought that

regretted her choice of the latter? Had he not seen her fly from the sight of the man she had goaded to desperation and sin, as she would have done at the intrusion of the vilest out-cast? She could never endure his glance again; the associations called up by the sight of him, the sound of his voice, would crush her to the earth with shame.

She had to encounter this trial before another morning dawned. Soon after midnight, the fever and delirium reached their height. The sick man shouted and sang, and tossed from one side of the bed to the other; flinging his arms aloft, and beating his chest and head — the seats of the torture he was suffering. Katy, who lay on a sofa in the nursery, to be within call, should her mistress need her, became frightened, and, unbidden, ran down to the parlor, where Willie sat reading, too restless and anxious to sleep. The girl's report brought him quickly to the scene of action. He reached the door in time to see the patient struggle to rise, and, being restrained by his wife, strike her with such force that she staggered, and would have fallen, but for Dunbar's supporting arm.

"He did not mean it! He is quite wild!" panted the poor woman, dizzy with pain, yet fearful lest the shadow of blame should be attached to her husband.

"I know it! You should have let me come up sooner! This is not fit work for you!"

Once, and once only, did Jessie remember her sin so clearly as to recoil from his friendly assistance, during the hours of terrible solicitude that ensued. As Roger became drowsy or weary, he was more quiet, only stirring at intervals. They supposed that he had fallen asleep, when he unclosed his languid eyes, and sang, brokenly —

"Clasped to your heart in a loving embrace,
With your long lashes just sweeping my face,
Never hereafter to wake or to weep —"

The faint murmur died away utterly, and he slept indeed — was it to wake never more? So the wretched wife believed, and the stony anguish of her attitude and visage moved Willie to whisper a word of cheer and hope. The gesture that waved him back was imperative — almost wrathful.

Five minutes elapsed, before she opened her white lips to say — “You mean well, but I know best what I have to bear!”

Day came, and Roger slumbered still. Sunrise brought the doctors. Jessie expected no comfort; did not observe the exchange of congratulatory looks that succeeded their inspection of the sleeper. When Dr. Elder beckoned her into the nursery, she went to receive the sentence of Roger’s departure.

“You are tired out, dear child! You must take rest, or I shall be called in to you next.”

She made no reply, did not move her dull eyes from the face visible through the open door, resting on the pillow, with closed lids and strange, bluish shadows upon it.

The doctor made another effort to arouse her. “You must husband your strength, for he will require capital nursing for some time yet.”

“What did you say?” demanded Jessie, alive and eager enough now. “Do you mean that he is —”

“Better decidedly! The fever has left him. We think that he will awake, conscious. We hope he will be spared to you for many years!”

“HE hath not dealt with me according to my iniquity!” cried the wife, in a burst of glad tears, as her head sank upon the cradle where her boy — the father’s miniature — lay sleeping.

The doctor left her — for she had forgotten him, and she could pray once more.

It was not until Roger sat again in his arm-chair in the snug

parlor, clad in dressing-gown and slippers; his feet upon a cushioned stool; himself, pale and weak, but full of happy and grateful emotions, that his loving nurse crept up behind him, and drawing his head to her bosom, confessed, with falterings and blushes many, the proud, resentful thoughts, mistaken conclusions and evil resolves she had nursed into baleful life, from the germ of his one hasty speech.

“Which was unmanly, ungenerous, and *false*, as the sayings of angry people generally are!” said Roger, kissing away the tears that were ready to fall. “Never mind, darling! Sharp and difficult as has been the lesson, we will have no cause to regret it, if we make the memory of this, our great, and nearly fatal error, the beacon to warn us from the outermost current of such dangerous whirlpools, for time to come. ‘Bear and forbear!’ is a safe rule for married people, dearest — but there is one better and safer for them and for everybody else, for that matter — ‘*Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them!*’”

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